
S E R M O N S

O N

V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S.

Price THREE SHILLINGS.

S E R M O N S



VARIOUS SUBJECTS

THE THREE SHILLINGS

S E R M O N S

O N

V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S.

B Y T H E L A T E

Rev. BENJAMIN THOMAS,

O F M A L M S B U R Y.

V O L. II.

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all in vain; they would dry up the tear of
affliction, and diffuse a happiness which would
return to them from the hands of the poor and
the gratitude of thousands. It is a moving
consideration, that while the great of our
land, distinguished by the richness
L U K E XVI. 31.

And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses, and
the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though
one rose from the dead.

THIS excellent observation is introduced
with a parable, in which the effects of
great riches and pomp are very strongly dis-
played. Not much, indeed, to the honour of
humanity; but, nevertheless, founded upon
the truth of every day's observation. Would
to God there were few of the characters of
the rich man, in the parable, in our land. If

the great, who are clothed in purple, and even in times of general scarcity fare sumptuously every day, felt a sympathy for their fellow creatures in distress; for those sons of wretchedness and want, that daily, either at their gate, or at a distance, are imploring aid from the hands of power, they would not let them ask in vain; they would dry up the tear of affliction, and diffuse a happiness, which would return to them loaded with the blessings and the gratitude of thousands. It is a moving consideration, that while the great of our land, distinguish themselves by the richness of their attire, the pomp of their equipage, and the sumptuousness of their tables; the poor, the sons of labour and industry, are scarcely otherwise distinguished than by the greatness of their distresses and wants.

But, before we proceed to a discussion of the doctrine contained in the text, it may be proper to make some observations on the parable. It is introduced at the 19th verse: "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed

clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores."

What a complication of distress and misery is here! the wretchedness of extreme poverty, heightened by a loathsome bodily disorder; yet this object, sufficient, one would think, entirely to destroy every principle of dissipation and pride, and soften the most obdurate to a just humanity; this object exhibiting the keenest anguish, found no compassion. Perhaps the insolence of servants spurned him from the gate; or, at most, left him amidst the sorrow of his soul, to pour forth torrents of unavailing tears. Gracious Heaven! amid the effusions of thy bounty, when the whole earth is stored with the riches of thy power; are the effects of thy tenderness so confined, that great numbers of thine offspring are no otherwise fed

than with the bread of sorrow; grasped at by those who have hardened their hearts against the cries of their brethren? Lazarus, though entitled to share of the bounties of the Almighty, had, however, no other expedient to support life, than an appeal to the charity of mankind; but even here he was disappointed; the rich man, surrounded by gait and pomp, deafened to every call on his feelings, by the noise of luxury and riot, could not attend to his plea; he was left the victim of poverty and disease; to the dogs who licked his sores. What a field is here to expatiate on the ingratitude, the pride, the cruelty of mankind? but we must proceed with the parable. "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried." The poor man quitted life, and no notice was taken of the event; but the rich man was buried with funeral pomp and solemnity. Vain pageantry! The poor man found relief in death; it was to him a welcome messenger, it

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it wafted him to happiness, and lodged him in Abraham's bosom. But the rich man lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment: How altered their conditions! He, who on earth denied misery the crumbs of his table, now solicits mercy to be administered by the hands of him, to whom he shewed no mercy. In this life, such reverses have been often known: and it is, perhaps, the greatest punishment a mind of any sensibility can feel. "And he cried, and said, father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." This favour, however, was not granted; first, because in life he enjoyed every temporal blessing which he abused, &c. And, secondly, because, to make use of the figurative language of the parable, there was a great impassable gulf, fixed between the regions of misery and despair, and the seats of happiness and peace; that is, there is no possibility of a change after death; the work is finished, and the degree of

happiness must be in proportion to the disposition a man in this life has formed for the enjoyment of it.

Upon his next petition is founded the declaration contained in the text. "Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them; and he said, nay father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent; and he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

One would be apt to conclude, from this petition, that he had learned humanity in hell; but this prayer is by no means to be laid to the score of his benevolence, for though partners in happiness, tend to enlarge the bliss of a liberal good mind, yet it will by no means hold, that companions in misery allevi-

late distress; it is too evident, that it has quite a contrary effect; but waving this, let us examine into the reasonableness of the request; and first, whether a messenger from the dead would be the proper instructor; that is, whether it is consistent with the rule of order, the oeconomy of Providence, or the circumstances of a free agent? and, secondly, admitting that the Almighty might, according to the laws of order, send such a minister among us to preach the doctrine of repentance and good works; whether he could enforce a general conviction? and, lastly, whether the present motives to religion are not, in every respect, sufficient to the purposes of salvation.

First, whether a messenger from the dead would be the proper instructor, or be consistent with the rule of order, and the oeconomy of Providence.

In order to illustrate this, it is necessary to observe, that a wise governor must always act according to some general and fixed rule,

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and that this rule must arise from, and depend upon the circumstances and connections of those to be governed; otherwise, all would be irregular and confused, and no rational effect could be produced. From an observation of the system of nature, we find this to be the case with inanimate matter, and the brute creation; the moon and stars perform their revolutions, the earth brings forth her increase; winter and summer, night and day follow each other in a regular succession, according to a fixed and determined necessity. By the same law, but varied, as circumstances require, are brutes led to perform all the functions of life, by what is denominated instinct. By the same law, at least by an equal necessity, is man, by the influence of a reasoning power, forced to act consistent with the intentions of Heaven, so far as the concerns of the present existence require. We see, therefore, in the works of God, a regular plan, or law, pursued through the immense scale of creation and Providence, but admirably varied, as the
nature

nature and circumstances of creatures and things vary.

This leads us, therefore, to observe, that as man is a reasonable creature, that is, as he can think, reflect, reason, and deliberate, and by the use of these faculties can determine what is hurtful, what advantageous, and what beneficial to him. Reason was, therefore, appointed by his Maker, as his fixed, invariable law; by it he was to *regulate* and *influence* his conduct, and to pursue his happiness under its direction. This, therefore, is order; and a wise and natural disposition of things: and it would consequently be contrary to this order, to permit any event to come to pass, that, in the end would supercede the necessity, either of the improvement, or exercise of this principle.

The messenger from the dead, especially if he came with that apparatus of terror which fancy naturally invests him with, would infallibly have this effect; for, instead of reasoning,

ing, *terror, surprise, and amazement*, would take hold of the soul, and suspend all its other operations. But farther, since nature is to man the school of knowledge; the field from whence he is to glean the seed of instruction and wisdom; such an interruption of the order of things would render all researches and observations useless. But it may perhaps be objected, that the extraordinary revelations and miracles, under the ancient and christian dispensations, might upon this supposition be deemed contrary to regularity and order. I answer in the negative; these, though wonderful operations, were performed by ordinary means, and in a familiar manner; and the whole scheme, was an evident appeal to the hearts and understandings of mankind. So that if one were to rise from the dead, attended as I have already supposed with all the terrors of immortality; every generous exertion of soul, every finer sentiment of duty, the love of God, the beauty and reasonableness of virtue, would be extinguished, and man's liberty

be destroyed, which, at the same time would be destroying the man, as a moral being, and rendering him incapable of either reward or punishment. As such consequences flow from the admission of a messenger from the dead, &c. it cannot be permitted by a wise, a just, and good God. But, which was the second thing proposed to be considered, admitting that the Almighty might, agreeable to the laws of order, send such a minister among mankind to preach the doctrine of salvation and good works, would this enforce a general conviction? at first, the novelty of the thing would excite great attention, it would astonish for a day; but as soon as the hearers became acquainted and familiar with the preacher he might then fairly give over every hope of reformation; and like the present set might be followed for custom-sake, but very little attended to; the people might long for novelty, or perhaps, tell him to the face, he was an impostor. Besides, what could he say, but what we are able to say; for every thing

thing that is proper for man to know, and perhaps indeed, all that he is capable of knowing in this state of imperfection, with regard to the unseen world, is revealed in the gospel. And there is another extremely important objection to this extraordinary preacher. He could possibly be useful, only in the small circle of friends and old acquaintance: to others he would be unknown, and consequently be immediately suspected of carrying on a fraud. But suppose the truth of his pretensions were confirmed by a multitude of credible witnesses, might they not be suspected either to be deceived themselves; or, that however fair and honest they might appear, be carrying on some grand scheme of imposture? Or what would the succeeding age think of such a matter? They would, at least the greatest number would, deem it a wild piece of fanaticism. Our Saviour and his apostles gave, by their miracles, the most astonishing proof of the truth of their pretensions; yet for years made but few converts. And in every age there have

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have been cavillers, who have disputed the truth of the Christian facts; so that to render the method of preaching repentance of any tolerable benefit; every town and village upon the face of the whole earth, must have one or more of these spiritual beings; and, to be useful to posterity, they must be changed with every new generation of men. The absurdity of the scheme is so apparent, that I shall insist no more upon it, but proceed to consider in the third place, whether the present motives to religion are not, in every respect, sufficient to engage us in its duties, and for the purposes of salvation. Man, as I have already observed, is a reasonable creature, and his constant pursuit is happiness; he must, therefore, or all his aim for happiness will be of no effect, be capable of hope and fear, love and hatred, and all those passions that are the spurs of action. He must be capable of being moved by promises and threatenings; by the hope of reward and the dread of punishment. The Christian religion is sufficient for all these emotions

emotions in the soul. On the one hand it comes recommended as giving life, joy, and immortality to all its sincere votaries. On the other, to the vicious and unregenerate, it is armed with the terrors of the Almighty. On the one hand it marks with the greatest precision, the path that leads to misery and pain; on the other, it explains, so as not to be misunderstood, those actions and duties, that are necessary to be performed, so as to secure the favour of the Almighty, and establish our happiness in this world, and in that which is to come.

In the gospel, a reasonable being has every necessary instruction, and every necessary motive to that which is right and fit to be done. Its doctrines are plain, rational, and simple; its precepts are such, that reason must approve, and that conscience must obey to be happy: "the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burthen is light," &c. We cannot but conclude, that the gospel contains every thing necessary to the purposes of salvation; and
that

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that if we have Moses and the prophets,
and obey not the voice of Christ, neither
should we, though one came unto us from
the dead.

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SER.

S E R M O N XVII.

The General Epistle of J U D E, ver. 3.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation; it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith, once delivered to the saints.

AN indifference to religion, or a cool, unconcerned and dispassionate regard to the interests of virtue, and the advancement of truth and knowledge, is inconsistent with the character of a man of sense and honesty; for a man of integrity will embrace the truth, so far as he can perceive it, in every dress and
appear-

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appearance, however few its admirers, however weak and poor its disciples: to him it will always appear of beautiful growth, though depressed by the assaults of bigotry and ignorance, or when cloathed in the humble vestments of poverty and want; he feels and owns its charms as powerfully as when it is surrounded with pomp and grandeur, and shines in the palaces of kings: this is the character of the upright man, he who despises equally the applause or scoffs of a giddy, unthinking multitude; dares think for himself, choose for himself, and exhibit his real sentiments to the world. Such may each of us prove, the patrons of truth; the warm, but rational and candid defenders of the real religion of Jesus Christ. The world may frown upon us, the unthinking may condemn us; but our conscience will discharge us, and the God of Heaven will approve of our conduct. And when compared to these, what are the short-lived triumphs of popular applause? what the glitter of pride, the smiles of power, or the fleeting, uncertain gleams of fortune? But how few of

this amiable character are to be found in the world! The rich, the great, and the honourable of the earth, are ever the patrons of the current and fashionable religion. The multitude feel the shackles of education too forcibly to exert their reason, or the freedom of using it; they are bound to the religion of their fathers, however irrational and absurd, nor can they dare to strike out a path of their own, though it should be in their power, while the connexions of friendship or family, the inducements of company, or the love of gain, secure to the interests of the popular creed, the unthinking and the fordid. Religion wherever it is established is sure to be cloathed with the trappings of grandeur: and parade and ceremony is called in to heighten its solemnity, to hide its amiable simplicity, and to strengthen the hands of superstition.

Enthusiasm gathers strength; the giddy and the weak are lulled to peace; the majority are on its side, and its very fopperies are sanctified with the air of antiquity: this is the case in most countries; were we to travel to

the east, and over those vast regions, once illumined by the gospel, we should find the impostures of Mahommed darkening the understanding. Are there any who dissent from the established error, and bow not the knee to Baal, are there any who separate themselves to God, and obey the voice of truth? no, what with the sword of persecution on the one hand, and the grandeur and emoluments of state on the other; the increase of knowledge, or any proper exertion of the rational powers is prevented; both temporal and spiritual despotism reigns over them with an iron rod, and general morals are left undefended, but by the laws to punish what may be called a violation of them. Were we to come nearer home; and search for the friends of truth, in the lands of popish superstition; how few should we find disinterested enough, or endued with sufficient fortitude of mind, to contend for the purity of the faith, once delivered to the saints! And even in our own country, enlightened as we are with the beams of the great sun of righteousness; how few do we

behold that are anxious for the faith, once delivered to the saints! how few follow after truth from sentiment; how very few are even religious from principle! as in all other places, so in Britain; the voice of the people is deemed the voice of God; the majority determine the dispute, and truth must lie at the mercy, or caprice of the multitude. Circumstanced then as we are, nothing can at present be more needful, than to contend for the purity of religion, and the chaste morality of the Gospel.

But how is this to be done? are men to be retained on the side of religion, from views of interest, or the dread of poverty? or is the infidel to be reclaimed by the prospect of a dungeon, by fines, imprisonments, racks, and tortures? it must be confessed, that these are arguments which very few care to resist; but with whatever outward success these means have been attended, truth has been a considerable loser. Churches may be filled by such means, these carnal weapons may drive them to the temple; but they will also convert

vert that temple, the house of prayer, to a den of thieves; to become the seat of the scornful, and the dwelling for impiety, profaneness, and ridicule. Let us therefore contend for the faith, agreeable to its importance, with a zeal, warm in the cause of truth, but mingled and tempered with evangelical meekness and charity.

With the amiable benevolence and tenderness of a Christian the apostle addresses the whole church of Christ, with the humane prayer: "*Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.*" Where religion prevails, the genuine religion of the heart; the upright intention, and a conscientious regard to duty; there the generous design and the holy affections break forth into corresponding acts of piety and resignation to Heaven, into a warmth of humanity, and a general good will to mankind. It was from this sentiment sprung the concern of the apostle, for the religious welfare of all Christians; lest superstition should once more darken their understandings, and bring them back to the corrupt lusts of the

flesh; his whole soul is manifestly engaged, as became the dignity and importance of his character. The subject of the epistle is of universal concern; it is the purity of Christianity, and the religion, once delivered to the saints by the mouth of inspiration: that religion which dignifies, perfects, humanizes, and renders us happy; or, as the apostle styles it, *the common salvation*; that salvation which was proposed to every individual; and which all may attain to, by an honest, upright, industrious life, and an unprejudiced enquiry.

But before we proceed, it is worth while to attend to the apostle's manner of expressing himself. "*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation,*" &c. we may perceive hence, that the Christian religion with its happy effects was not designed to be confined to a few favoured mortals, but to extend its blessings to every one that would accept of them: the old distinctions of Jew and Gentile vanished with the commencement of the Christian dispensation: in the great household

household of God, there is no partiality in the distribution of favours ; as every reasonable creature is the offspring of the Divinity, so each shares of his affection and bounty ; not as in human societies, where the guilty are frequently screened from the hand of justice, and raised to wealth, distinction, and magnificence, is the order of the divine kingdom carried on ; the great infallible God, unerring in the distribution of his favours, punishes and rewards without respect of persons ; but, according to their real merit or demerits.

Such are the principles which the religion of Jesus advances, with respect to the government of the great God : principles that tend immediately to relieve the hearts of men, from the anxiety and dread, which wrong the apprehensions of his nature, and implant in the mind sentiments that cherish and refresh every seed of virtue, and ripen them to the good fruit of benevolence, piety, and justice. Principles that infinitely deserve to be a standing model for the regulation of societies in general

and the particular conduct of private persons.

A religion, then, how worthy to be supported against the invasion of imposture; the cavils of infidelity; the flights of the unprincipled, or the innovations of evil-minded or superstitious men. How reasonable then, the injunction, that we should earnestly contend for the purity and divine nature of the faith, once delivered to the saints. But let it never be forgot, that while we do contend, we do it without the warmth of ill-guided passion; with the benevolent and candid spirit of men of sense and virtue.

SERMON

S E R M O N XVII.

COLOSSIANS III. 23.

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord,
and not unto men.

THIS chapter contains a system of the purest and most exalted religion, delivered in the most familiar terms, the plainest and most concise method; and enforced by the most engaging motives; every precept deserves to be transcribed: but read them; view there the spirit of the gospel, and be thankful and obedient; and may the word of Christ dwell

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dwell in you richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

An ingenuous mind may here observe a picture of the most exalted moral excellence: and be excited to admire, with reverence and gratitude, the divinity of that religion, which is so admirably calculated to advance the virtue and welfare of mankind.

The great apostle of the Gentiles, after having exhibited in the strongest light, the divine nature of the gospel rule of faith, of which he himself was so bright an ornament; shews us amazing advantages derived from it to mankind: and, indeed, if the whole world lived according to its principles; if the love of God and Christ inspired their bosoms; if they put on (as the elect of God) bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as Christ forgives us: If, above all, they put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness; if the peace of God ruled in their hearts, to which they are called in one body; how glorious, how happy would
the

the societies of mankind prove? no ill-natured suspicions would then blast the young buds of virtue: no groundless jealousy destroy the fair fruits of friendship: no instances of black ingratitude stop the generous current of hospitality and melting pity: all open and sincere; all kind and benevolent: the hand of power and wealth, instead of wielding the iron rod of oppression and rapine, would then be a shield to innocence, to the weak, and to him that had no helper.

Ambition, instead of running astray to the fields of blood, and desolation, would then be directed to objects more worthy and exalted, and employed in such pursuits only, which can deliver our names down to posterity, loaded with the incense of gratitude and rational applause; embalmed with the tears of the helpless orphan, and the desolate widow! When shall this happy, this delightful period commence? When, who shall be the wisest, who shall be the best, will be the ardent ambition of mankind? It will arrive: when the spirit of the gospel inspires the human heart: when mankind, whatever they

they do, do it heartily as to the Lord: especially when they consider, that from the Lord they shall receive the reward of happiness, if they obey his commandments: and that he who doeth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; for, with God, there is no respect of persons.

In discoursing farther upon this subject, I shall examine what is to be understood by the expression, *whatsoever* ye do, do it *heartily*. Secondly, the object of our actions, &c. The word *heartily* must be understood here as having two senses: both which are absolutely necessary to stamp the character of worth and excellence upon any intention; and, without these ingredients, all our parade of virtue will be of no avail, and our brightest actions no other than splendid sins. The two I mean, are zeal and sincerity; principles, how amiable! how excellent!—unless these lay the foundation of our characters, we have, in fact, nothing to render them praise-worthy; and our virtue will be only the shadow of religious existence, producing no genuine efforts for the attain-

attainment of holiness, in heart or life. Destitute of sincerity, our external actions; whatever appearance of truth, and goodness they may have, must be only calculated as the cloak of unrighteousness: our humility, the trick of hypocrites, to cover some black design of ambition or covetousness: our justice, the effect of servility, or the dread of punishment: and our friendship, the instrument of treachery and deceit. Without zeal, our virtues would languish and die away; the dictates of reason alone are too slow, too deliberate, either to render us useful to one another, or to excite us to the attainment of any great religious or moral excellence. Zeal, which is the offspring of well-directed and well-managed passion, is absolutely necessary to form a good character, either in the paths of religion or knowledge.

Unanimated by this principle, how could we ever climb the tedious and difficult ascents of knowledge; how advance on the great scale of Christian perfection, amidst the anxieties of life, the tumults of passion, and the allurements

ments of sin! but inspired with a genuine zeal for knowledge, and virtue; what amazing attainments have been made in both, by beings circumstanced as we are; subject to the same troubles, and perhaps of no greater extent of understanding, or stronger abilities than ourselves; how have some, by the greatness of their toil, at length obtained such treasures of knowledge as seemed to raise them above humanity? while others, who pursued with indefatigable ardour, the paths of science, as contained in the gospel of Christ, have at length arrived at such a knowledge, and such a purity as seemed almost equal to the inhabitants of immortality. And, while the philosopher with all his wisdom, could only trace the footsteps of the great Creator in the visible universe, and that through a glass darkly; these were enabled to explore the mysteries of that heavenly state; where dwell the spirits of just men made perfect. But much study is a weariness to the flesh, and upon this account, mankind are too apt to entertain a false kind of humility, with respect to their abilities; pretending,

pretending, that with all their industry, it will be impossible for them to arrive at such a pitch of excellence. The consequence is, sloth and indifference, enemies alike to knowledge and virtue, darken their understanding, and enervate their powers; how much reason then, have we to urge the precept in the text?

To form a genuine religious character, sincerity and zeal are indispensable principles: "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." As our prayers and praises, unless we are hearty, sincere, and fervent, cannot be acceptable at the tribunal of the great God, so neither our acts of justice, mercy, and other social virtues, unless animated by a sincere principle, can be pleasing in his sight. For he is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. And again, he searcheth the hearts and loveth truth in the inward parts. But were we to analyze our actions we should soon find, that every act, however plausible in appearance, if destitute of sincerity, is also destitute of virtue, and is no
other

other than a *splendid sin*: it was intended as the instrument of ambition, covetousness, or pride, and its consequence is ever detrimental to public welfare or the happiness of individuals. - And as sincerity is necessary to constitute the virtue of an action, so it is also ever attended with a vigorous execution.

Sincerity and zeal give a vigour and a heartiness to our conduct, which otherwise would languish into dull formality, and lifeless indifference. Mere reason, guided by the light of the gospel, is sufficient to point out the path of duty; but, as I have already observed, there is another principle, necessary to urge us on, we have many difficulties to overcome; many trials to withstand; and without this animating principle, we should be too apt to slacken in our pursuit, or be tempted to turn aside to the flowery fields of pleasure, dissipation, and sin. The cool and minute philosopher is for ever losing the opportunity of doing good, and consequently of mending his heart, and humanizing his dispositions, by social

cial and friendly offices, he is perhaps examining the propriety of the action, and in the scales of worldly wisdom, determining the real quantity of good it will produce, or from the tables of suspicious prudence, be calculating the expence or inconvenience it may involve him in; till the opportunity is gone by, and the deed of benevolence is lost to himself, and to the community. No longer calculate about the matter, you may depend upon it, the result will always be greatly in favour of every real act of religion and virtue: here we can incur no penalty; here we run no hazard, every chance is for us, and the prize of immortality will be ours. But perhaps it will be objected, this vigour of mind, this zeal and warmth are often attended with bad consequences; in religion they often degenerate into enthusiasm: in action to precipitancy, and indiscretion; and sometimes to folly and sin. Admitted, that through the imperfection of our nature, many instances may be produced in proof of this: my answer is an appeal to every good heart, to every tender spirit, to every one warm with

the sensibilities of a man; whose mind is formed on just and rational principles: would ye, in the moment of danger, when ye beheld the raging flames consume the habitation of your enemy, would ye indulge one recollection of his past unworthiness? would a principle of retaliation cool the ardour of your humanity? would revenge teach you to exult over the ruins of a man, who once injured you? no; urged on by benevolence, as it were an inspiration of Heaven, you would fly to his assistance, and relieve him from his terror, and surrounding distress. But to bring my observation yet closer to our religious conduct, we shall observe the reasonableness of the sentiment in the text: "Whatsoever you do, do it heartily," &c. if we only take a view of the religion of mankind in general; look into our churches, how careless! how indifferent! how formal are the public offices of devotion performed! while the heart ought to be engaged, while the soul should feel a pious ardour; when the affections ought to be on fire, touched as it were with a coal, from the sanctu-

ary of God,; observe how lifeless, how insipid their adoration, how careless to the words of the preacher; and like the adder, deaf to the voice of the charmer, let him charm never so sweetly. Their fathers went before them to the house of prayer; they have been taught it was their duty to attend the public offices of religion: and perhaps they look upon it as necessary, to preserve some reputation in the world! for, however strange it may sound, yet it is a lamentable truth, that the temple of God is become a sanctuary to the most abandoned characters; it is enough if they lay hold of the horns of the altar; the avenger must give up the pursuit. If they are zealous for externals, or violent for some popular doctrines, the world will hail them the sons and daughters of the Most High: it is in vain to assure mankind, that these devotees have really no religion at all; that they have scarcely one social or private virtue to render them useful in their days, or endear them to their God. Behold he prayeth; yes, but it is in the corner of the street, and in the chief places of con-

course: observe that good man with the face of penance, and mortification, estranged to the world and every voluptuous sentiment: see how he goes sorrowing along, behold he enters the house of mourning; would to Heaven he went there upon a scheme of benevolence, and that charity had been his guide! was it not enough that the hard hand of poverty was already heavy upon the widow and the orphan, but he must, under pretence of religion, take from her the little that she had left! Well, like the widow in the gospel, thou hast thrown thine all to the treasury of divine grace; thine intention was good, though thou gavest but little, it came from the heart; it was the free will offering of sincerity and zeal, and will find its reward, however it may be applied. By doing it heartily, as to the Lord, we are to understand, that the great and ultimate end of all our actions, is to promote the general happiness, by founding them upon those eternal and invariable principles of virtue, which, agreeable to the will of our Maker, are so clearly demonstrated to us in the gospel. We

are then doing them to his glory; we are then regarding him under the joint characters of our father, our preserver, our friend, our law-giver, and governor now, and our judge hereafter: And in consequence of these united attributes, entitled to our gratitude, reverence and love; not merely to the external expression, but to that vital, animating principle; to that heartiness and sincerity, without which, our religion is no other than the mere creature of pride, custom, or convenience. But this will profit us nothing, for God is satisfied only with the hearts of men: if, while we sacrifice upon his altar, we offer at the same time at the shrines of sensuality, ambition, malice, covetousness, or revenge; our worship will be foolish, and of no effect: this might easily be made appear from the first principles of morality and reason; but it is enough to Christians, to know that God is a spirit, and those who worship him, must do so in spirit and in truth.

We learn, therefore, that if fulfilling the laws of God, is the great principle of action,

and foundation of all religion ; it follows, that we are not to be of this, or that persuasion, because it is the religion of the state ; the popular, or fashionable religion ; the religion with which places, pensions, and the other emoluments of life are connected ; nor ought we to be ashamed of owning the truth, even in the most humble circumstances. Pride may despise us, or the sordid spirit may pity us ; but we shall obtain the approbation of Heaven, and truth and virtue will give us a dignity, and happiness, which the world can neither give, nor take away.

But we should also guard particularly against every unreasonable severity or affectation in religion : carefully avoid the gloom of superstition, and the madness of enthusiasm, on the one hand, which give religion an unkind unsocial aspect ; and on the other, that gait, indifference, and formality, which dissipate all serious reflection, and enervate every holy disposition.

But while every act of religion is to be done, as to the Lord, it is no crime in the concerns
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of life, to have a due respect to the applause and friendship of mankind: the motives of our action are superior, infinitely, to a partial or ill-judged applause; yet we are by no means to be careless about what opinion the world may form of us; for it is at best, but entertaining an uncourteous, if not an insolent kind of indifference, which our own feelings contradict, and for which no one will give us credit. There is a vast difference between endeavouring by fair, honest, and generous methods to inspire our friends and neighbours with favourable sentiments of us, and acting with no other view than to be seen of men. The Scribes and Pharisees of old did thus, and they had their reward. But the desire of the good opinion of the world seems an original disposition implanted in us, as a spur to virtue: however it is, and may have been perverted. What, for instance, is that spirit of ambition, which drives the hero to fields of death, but an original principle of nature run riot and astray? feels not every ingenuous mind, that its happiness is lessened by the

voice of scandal, however ill deserved: feels it not an unstudied propensity, to vindicate itself against the aspersions of wicked men? On the contrary, when the voice of the public, determines in its favour; enjoys he not a self complacency, which nothing but a consenting conscience, and a heart in union with public fame, can possibly produce? What can we conclude from hence, but that the Almighty has implanted in our bosoms, a desire of standing fair in the opinion of the world, as an additional inducement to the practice of every good and laudable action? And, indeed, great and good characters, are not only an ornament, but of the most eminent service to mankind; they spur on the active and virtuous to a glorious emulation of their shining qualifications: and may we never want such to reproach the indolence, and cure the sloth of those, who are at ease in our Zion! We must conclude, that while we are pursuing fame in any walk in life, we must not confine our views to this uncertain object, but to consider that there is a Being; who, though invisible,

invisible, observes our conduct, and, who will give the impression of worth to no character, but that of truth and sincerity. But it is improper to carry our love of public esteem too far, as the best principles may degenerate, or receive a different tincture from mixing with others: the ancient Pharisees, among whom that spirit, which thinketh no evil, hopeth all things, and believeth all things, was not known, carried their regard for men to a very ridiculous height; to gain their favourite point, they extended the bound of their phylacteries, they prayed at the corners of the streets, and took care to give the world very indecent proofs of their fastings, and mortifications. Various were the mischiefs they did to religion by such a conduct; they weaned the minds of the vulgar from an attention to its realities, while they fixed them upon mere external shews; and indeed those who have endeavoured to make religion, a stepping stone to fame, seldom fail to extend the bounds, of it or to light the torch of enthusiasm, and so rise to power, by the means

means of a deluded and fanatic people : while they confine the bounds of real virtue, and the genuine religion of the heart. For it is seldom the case, that any person establishes a great name in the world, who has nothing to support it, but the simplicity of his manners, the uprightness of his dealings, the purity and ardour of his devotion, and the open integrity of his heart ; such a one generally moves far from the noise, and bustle of life, in such scenes, where the trump of fame was never heard to blow. But after all, public esteem and praise, are both precarious and uncertain blessings. The best and wisest have often found them an impossible acquisition, and have had no other resource than an appeal to Heaven, who is the only judge of the character ; and in silence, while their hearts confirmed their title to public esteem, to mourn the malice, or ingratitude of mankind ; which, by the way, has often soured the gentlest spirits, and the kindest and most humane dispositions. But perish every praise obtained by illiberal methods, or by the sacrifice
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of our integrity; let every consideration be despised, in comparison of a good heart and the applause of our God. And whatever we find our duty to do, let us do it with all our might, as to the Lord, knowing that there is neither wisdom nor work, nor device in the grave.

S E R M O N

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of our society, for every consideration be
diligent, to secure a good heart
and the approval of our God. And whatever
we do, let us do it with a
good conscience, and knowing that
it is before God we are standing.

S E R M O N XVIII.

H A G G A I I. 7.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways.

THE prophet, throughout this chapter, reproves the people of the Jews for their neglect and remissness in the building of the second temple. At the return from the Babylonish captivity, Cyrus sent forth an order, that the temple should be built, and Jerusalem encompassed with walls: the work was begun; but by a false representation from the Samaritans to the court of Persia, it was again put a stop to, till they found an order from
Cyrus

Cyrus in the archives of the kingdom at Syria. It was, therefore, permitted to go on, but a spirit of indolence kept back this necessary work: the sacred place in which the sacrifices and offerings of the nation were to be made lay desolate, and idolatry began to flourish. But the text, though confined, may be applied to man in all his doings. As man is a being capable of thought and reflection; a creature, endued with a power to discern between right and wrong, good and evil, and the difference between the morality and immorality of actions; it must evidently be his duty to employ this reflective faculty to examine and scrutinize his conduct; to know whether he carries himself agreeable to the law of his nature, and the end Providence had in view, in forming him such a being as he is: whether he acts agreeable to the laws of virtue, or transgresses the dictates of reason, and acts an inconsistent part. I say it is his duty to use these rational powers, for the amendment and direction of his conduct through life: else why are these faculties granted to man, if he is not to employ them
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in the most eminent purposes of life. Divest man of power to act with thought and reason, even in the concerns of life, and what a scene of folly and confusion would this world soon exhibit? It is even so in the moral world; where, I am sorry to say enthusiasm, and superstition, have confounded principles, or rather drawn the attention from them, by the furious tempests they have raised: they are now, thank Heaven, considerably abated, but we are yet in a state of confusion. We are daily referring our actions to false principles, and nothing but candour and good sense will ever set us right. If men are driven by passion, or an unreasonable desire for this or that object of sense and appetite, how unpleasing the prospect, how disagreeable to a virtuous spectator! it is evident, reason alone gives a just claim to superiority over brute creatures: but, if we make no use of this distinguishing faculty, and are actuated by sense and instinct, what difference, save in shape and bodily distinctions? Religion must be founded in reason, and virtue be the result of repeated thought

thought and efforts. If we hearken to the calm deliberate dictate, of the intelligent principle within us, it will teach us what to do, what course of life to choose, as the most rational and most productive of inward peace and serenity of mind. The great directing principle of our nature paints the different actions of our lives in their true and proper colours: it shews the propriety of virtue, the beauty of holiness, while it represents vice as big with folly and guilt. The prophet David had transgressed the bounds of religion, and violated the great law of righteousness, and of God; and indeed what man upon earth, that acts with so much caution, as to avoid the snares and allurements of vice; or where is that man to be found, cloathed with flesh and blood, that is proof against all temptation, and sinneth not; that is uninfluenced by passion, and is always sensible of, and attends to the obligations of right conduct? But it ought to be our constant practice, to reflect on the nature and consequences of our actions, to guard against that vice which most easily besets us,
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and to endeavour, when we have done wrong, to do so no more. And at the close of each day, when all invites to, and inspires with serious reflection; to examine all our actions, to rectify what is wrong, and endeavour to be confirmed and established in that which is good. Such a daily practice would be attended with the best and most useful consequences; we should then never make any great progress in vice, we should never deliberately commit a dishonest and ungenerous, or an unkind action; and be still improving in all knowledge and virtue. If mankind were persuaded to think on their ways, to reflect on their moral actions, their nature and tendency, what a reformation would this practice soon produce among reasonable beings? The Almighty, who is the best judge of the nature of man, declares, that the wickedness and impiety of his antient people, the Jews, were wholly owing to their want of thought and reflection; Isaiah i. 3. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider; and when God had made
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use of diverse means for their reformation, he still directs his prophets to make use of other methods, saying, it may be my people will consider. And the prophet Haggai addresses his fellow subjects: Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways; Isaiah, in the 44th chapter describes the abominable idolatries of the Jewish people, and still attributes their folly to a want of serious thought and reflection; in the 19th verse he observes: none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge or understanding to say, I have burned part of it (that is, a part of that which he had made an idol of) in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread, upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination; and shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? Hence it appears that reason, thought, and serious consideration, is the grand corner-stone, the foundation and basis of virtue and true religion; otherwise we must act without meaning, be liable to a thousand inconveniencies, and follow

just as example may point, or passion hurry us. It appears, also, in the next place, that thought and reflection are the first steps to a good life; David thought on his way, he considered in what manner he had hitherto conducted himself, and the result of it was a happy conclusion; he saw the impropriety of his past conduct, discerned the obligations of virtue, the reasonableness of obedience to the law of his Creator, and he turned to God's testimonies. Were all men, to think on their ways; were the unjust, the vain, the profligate, the intemperate, and profane, the bold and thoughtless sinner, to reflect on the dreadful consequences of their conduct; surely they could not still persevere in their vices, and add to the number of their sins: but the misfortune is, there are in the world so many objects, that draw our attention; such a vast variety of ways and means, for suppressing serious thought; that the majority of our fellow creatures, through the hurry of business, scarcely allow themselves any time to think; while others, whom Providence

flence hath blessed with affluence, and a strong constitution, are for ever immersed in noise and riot, softened by pleasure, and unmanned by luxury, will not, or cannot think. Having so many objects to encourage a dissipation of mind; or, perhaps, so far involved in guilt, that it is too painful to look back, and take a calm and serious review of their past conduct. But how inexcusable is that person, who in enjoying the good things his situation in life affords him, suffers them to deprive him of those peculiar characteristics of humanity, consideration and reflection! How must he condemn himself, when sickness gives leisure for thought, when his constitution or his age oblige him to consider in what manner he has spent his time, and what opportunities of improvement in knowledge and virtue he has lost, in trifling and unprofitable pursuits? Then it will appear how beneficial it is to think on our ways, and to examine our dispositions. But it would be happy for mankind, if they were influenced to think on their ways betimes; in

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the health and vigour of life; there would then be some prospect of a good effect; they would pass through life, though perhaps not fortunately, yet on sure principles, without the perplexity and confusion which accompany men of immoral characters: for it must be of great consequence, in the estimate of our characters, by the great infallible Judge of the whole earth, whether the consideration of our past conduct gave us pleasure or pain, at a time when the expectation of a longer enjoyment was at an end. The first step then that must be taken, is to consider with candour our ways, whether they have been agreeable to the great rules of virtue? whether we have been influenced by the love of truth and goodness? In the second place, in what manner we ought to conduct ourselves? To the first, conscience, a faithful witness, will give in her just verdict; she will recollect our propensities, and truth will appear. And to the second, reason, and a warm attention to the eternal rule of right, will direct us in the way we should

should walk: the gospel will give a sanction to the whole, and the result will be a general submission to the laws of virtue and of God. Various are the methods Providence makes use of to awaken us to a sense of our duty. This is expressed in a strongly figurative manner in the gospel. Christ knocks at the door of our hearts; and the spirit of God intreats us to hear his voice. By the ministry of the word; by loss of friends and relations; by sickness; by many other adversities, and various concurring causes in life, does our kind, Almighty Father call us to himself. Before, saith the Psalmist, I was afflicted, I went astray, but now do I keep thy word: And again, it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. "In their affliction they will seek me early." Suppose then, some person, who has hitherto had no regard to his duty, awakened into it, roused to thought, and to a sense of the propriety of enquiring into the natural tendency of his present actions; and willing to learn the best

and most advantageous manner of regulating his future conduct. Such a person must be sensible that as yet, he has lived but to little purpose; that his life has been a series of inconsistencies, nay of folly and madness: he must perceive (if he forms an impartial estimate) that he has acted an unworthy, unmanly part; and that at present he is incapable of enjoying any rational happiness: this will lead him to a resolution to abandon his former courses, and attend seriously to his improvement. Such a reformation would be likely to be lasting, because experience has informed him of being wrong; and the more universal experience of mankind bears witness to the great truth, that the virtuous alone are possessed of the invaluable art of enjoying life in peace and comfort; and that vice necessarily destroys, or greatly impairs our fortune, our health, our reputation, and that serenity of mind, which all had once the power of preserving, and but few possess. Without it, we are like the troubled sea, as scripture beautifully

fully informs us: And there is no peace among us. May these considerations, as they are founded in reason, and supported by revelation, influence every being to reflect on his conduct; on the tendency, the real fundamental motive of his actions: this alone can entitle him to the character of an intelligent creature; assimilate him to the Divinity, or entitle him to his favour; and by this alone can he enjoy the pleasing approbation of his own mind, and secure his happiness in a future world.

As a capacity of thought and reflection raise us above the brutes that perish, and in some measure liken us to the Divinity, (being in respect of our moral powers, created in his divine likeness,) I say, as these moral faculties lift us high in the great chain of being, they must necessarily be given to some wise and good purpose: surely it cannot be supposed that this inestimable jewel was given us to be hidden in obscurity, or to bury its lustre in neglect and disuse. Say rather, it was given

that the possessor should exhibit it to open view; not merely by way of ostentation, but for real ornament and real use. These talents were given that we should improve them, from one, if possible, up to ten talents; in that case the design of Heaven is admirably answered, when our own happiness is secured, and advanced by a rich increase in knowledge and virtue, and the graces of religion. Vain are the powers of reason, if authority only be our guide; vain the doctrines of the gospel, if we exclude reason from a share in directing us; vain all the distinguishing faculties of human nature, if we exert them not on proper occasions: and where can they be properly exerted, if not in a regulation of our sentiments and principles, and moral conduct. If our happiness depends on ourselves, as it certainly does, can thought and reflection be too much exerted, to guide us in the pursuit; to direct our conduct, correct our errors, open our eyes, and enlighten our hearts. Thus saith the Lord, consider your ways: it is
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the voice of reason, of nature, and of God. Attend to it ye children of men! by a continued effort of thought, we shall observe the righteousness or unrighteousness of our ways; and by a due exertion of the powers granted us by Heaven, we shall in time reduce them to the divine standard of the gospel: we cannot be perfect at once, in a day, a month, or a year; but we shall be going on to perfection, we shall be weakening the force of vicious principles, if we cannot eradicate them, and render ourselves happy by habitual endeavours to persevere in that which is good. Religion may be compared to a small seed; at first it requires much care to cherish and preserve it; thorns and briers at first infest the soil; the tender plant is long in danger to be choaked with baneful influence, or to be pulled up by the rough hands of every bold invader, or be neglected and forgotten. Cherish then the heavenly plant; let fortitude guard it from injury; water it from the springs of truth: it will every day get stronger, spread its fair branches

branches to the sun, and pour rich odour all around: from the unfavourable clime of this world, it will be transplanted to happier regions; to the gardens of its Creator; where it will bloom afresh, and bear the fruit of peace, of joy, and of everlasting life.

S E R M O N XIX.

L U K E XIV. 23.

And the Lord said unto the servants; go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in.

THIS parable alludes to the call given to mankind of all conditions, and circumstances, by the gospel; it represents the method which the Divine Providence made use of, for the propagation of truth, and the religion of Jesus. Agreeable to the directions of Heaven, this appeared, and was first published among the Jews; and upon their rejection

jection of it, the apostles turned to the Gentiles, and to them preached the glad tidings of the way of salvation by Christ. The design of this parable is evidently moral; it is calculated to give the world the most worthy notions of the Deity; the justice of his ways and the goodness of all his dispensations. He excludes no people from his grace and favour; he makes no other difference among mankind than what their moral characters make. He would never have rejected his ancient people, had they continued worthy of his favour. When the gospel was proposed to them, as a divine rule of conduct and supported by the concurrence of a series of the miraculous operations of the Divinity: I say, when the gospel was thus proposed to them, they rejected it with contempt, and despised the righteous intentions of Providence. It was not agreeable to their maxims of government and conduct: it condemned pride, avarice, and cruelty; it made moral distinctions the rules for characters to be valued; and

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looked on superstitious rites as vain and useless: their hearts petrified with the pride of life, scorned so humble a teacher, and rejected the proffered salvation: they would not obey the voice that spake from Heaven, but with one consent began to make excuses. The first had bought a piece of ground; the other, five yoke of oxen; and the third had married a wife, and therefore could not come: so that the servant came and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant, go out quickly unto the streets, and lanes, of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. As if he had said, the great and rich men of this world have found the gospel incompatible with pride, luxury, and covetousness, and have refused the offers of grace, made by the divine Being: but the poor will readily receive them, go, make no distinctions between high and low; give all mankind the offers of pardon: they will prize and accept of the gift. And the servant said, Lord,

Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded; and yet there is room. The treasures of goodness are never exhausted; the benevolence of God is great and unconfined as his being. Wherever true religion dwells; wherever conscious virtue and integrity reside, there is happiness; say, do there, on do there! for the kingdom of Heaven is within you. The blessed Saviour says, in another place, "in my Father's house are many mansions;" if it were otherwise, I would have told you so. As the presence of the Deity, his goodness, and mercy are unbounded; so is the habitation of the just. It would be the highest absurdity to suppose, they were in the least confined: No; they range the wide field of nature, they pursue the steps of God, with unwearied delight and satisfaction; they trace his wisdom, and dwell on his perfections, with increasing joy and happiness. It is done as thou hast commanded, yet there is room: And the Lord said unto the servant, "go out into the highways, and hedges, and compel them to come in:" turn from these unbeliev-
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ing tribes, and go to the Gentiles, they may hear my voice, and behold the Divine Messenger; they will see the beauty of God, and feel the force of truth. In another place, our great Redeemer commandeth his disciples to go and preach the gospel to every creature; and make known the ways of the most High to all the earth; for God is no respecter of persons; in every age, climate, and nation, every one that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him: he maketh no difference between the Greek and the Jew, but the same is Lord over all, and is rich unto all that call upon him. Isaiah, in a prophetic rapture, brings the days of the Messiah as it were present to him; he foresees the obstinacy of the Jewish people, and introduces the Saviour, as addressing the Deity upon that occasion. Is. xlix. 4. 5. 6. "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. And now saith the Lord that
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formed me from the womb, to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him : " Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, it is a light thing, that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel : I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be unto the end of the earth." Let none have such narrow conceptions of the great eternal Father of nature, as to think, that in the method of his grand universal providence, he is only consulting the happiness and welfare of a few of his creatures : no, like a tender and affectionate parent, he wishes well to every son and daughter he has upon earth, and consults their felicity in every reasonable method. He commissioned the primitive ambassadors of Heaven, and his present ministers of the gospel of peace, to compel men to come in, that his house might be filled. But in what sense these words (*compell them to come in*) are to be taken, shall be

be the subject of the remaining part of my discourse.

I need not mention what a handle wicked and designing men have made of this verse. Witness the horrid court of inquisition. Witness those racks and gibbets; those engines of malice, prepared for Christians in a country, which professed to act on the principles of the gospel. Need I tell you how, in one short reign, hundreds, in our own nation, were devoted to the flames? May such bloody accounts be for ever cancelled from the annals of Britain! Later ages found the inconveniency of sacrificing such a number of people, and refining upon persecution, adopted measures seemingly more gentle and mild; but considered, perhaps, as cruel as the other. An act of uniformity passed into a law, which required, upon the severe penalties of confiscation, and imprisonment, an assent to such articles of faith as were thought necessary to advance the interest of a party; and thus denied to all but themselves, the privilege of judging; and believing their own

senses in the important matters of religion. This act is now in a great measure in force, and Dissenters feel its weight: But it is no great honour to those, who with all their influence keep it in being, when they are told that it took place during the reign of a weak and effeminate monarch; who, in fact, believed nothing of Christianity; and who, while he found it his interest, for the sake of indulging an indolent disposition, to comply with, could not but detest their pious frauds. But, thank God, we enjoy our civil and religious liberties, though under some restrictions. All the absurd notions that have been entertained, and the cruel persecutions that have been raised in the Christian church, have been owing to false apprehensions of the nature and design of the gospel; either by not regarding the purpose of the writer, or taking things in a literal sense, which have been figuratively meant: however, they have seldom failed of making the purity of religion their plea; thus making Christianity the source of evils, horrid as ever the sun beheld. Compel them to come
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in, says our blessed Saviour; but in what manner? by force of arms? or moral persuasion? by the edge of the sword? by confiscations and imprisonments? or by a simplicity of manners, integrity of heart, strength of argument, and the glorious promises of immortal life? It must be one of the highest flights of enthusiasm and absurdity, to think that Jesus meant this in the literal sense; instead of answering his professed design of uniting the world in peace, good will, and universal benevolence, this had a necessary tendency to absorb all the social affections, to put an entire end to all the duties of reciprocal good offices; and sink humanity below the brutes. But in the name of all that is reasonable, how could the followers of Christ pretend to establish his religion by open violence; when the secular power, both Jewish and Heathen, was leagued against them, and esteemed their new doctrine as destructive to its policy. In the land of Judea, they were esteemed as the tools of sedition; in Greece, as foolish and illiterate men. What methods

did Saint Peter make use of to proselyte five thousand at once? All their force consisted in plain fair reasoning; and if they were mighty, it was in the scriptures. Saint Paul, when carried captive to the Areopagus, or made prisoner in the metropolis of the world, still gained many to the profession and belief of the gospel. Surely they could not make use of the secular power in such wretched circumstances! In short, whether they enjoyed the blessings of peace and freedom, or were confined to the gloom of a dungeon, they still compelled many to come in; their resigned and cheerful temper, under all difficulties, and the evident truth of their story, won upon the reason as well as the affections of men. Indeed, primitive Christianity, whatever some new-fangled systems may advance, did not require such inhuman methods to propagate it. "It encourages free enquiry, as the only foundation of rational conviction and sincere faith. The author condescended to remove every scruple, and answer every cavil, which his hearers might propose, that they might

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have no excuse for their incredulity. The life of Christ, says a worthy advocate for Christianity, is one continued display of benevolence and humanity; he was a generous lover of mankind, and instead of putting others to death, to cure their unbelief, he suffered it himself."

The method made use of by Christ, and the first preachers, was to address the reason and understanding of men; and thus, in spite of opposition, they triumphed over long established superstition and idolatry. The utmost persecution can possibly do, is to force a falsehood from the wretched sufferer; it is impossible the greatest cruelty should satisfy the scruples of an honest mind; or hide the absurdity of the doctrines it is designed to enforce from the keen eye of reason: what then is the conclusion, but that we ought to live in peace and harmony among one another; as it becomes the disciples, and followers of our kind and humane leader; permitting all men to enjoy their own private sentiments in quiet; and making it our highest endeavour to excel

each other, in ready and chearful obedience, to the will and laws of Heaven; thus alone can we imitate the blessed Jesus; who, in all conditions, chearfully resigned to his father's will, and made it his meat and drink to answer the design of him who sent him.

SERMON

A

FAST SERMON.

Preached, DECEMBER 13, 1776.

R O M A N S XII. 18.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live
peaceably with all men.

WE are not assembled at this time to discuss a political question on the justice, or injustice of the present war, or to imprecate the Divine vengeance upon our enemies; much less upon those, who, till of late, were considered as citizens of Britain; as friends

and brethren, connected with us in the tenderest manner. The thought would be unkind, would be ungenerous, unworthy of our characters as Britons, much more unworthy as Christians. I hope, therefore, to stand excused, if I do not choose to violate the sanctity of the pulpit, by introducing subjects unworthy so holy a place. Subjects, that however managed, have a direct tendency to inflame the mind, and poison the pure fountain of benevolence and Christian love. But we are met upon an infinitely more important business; we are met to humble ourselves before the Lord, to acknowledge our unworthiness and sins, and lowly and reverently to petition the Divine forgiveness: we are met to cultivate good dispositions, and to establish our hearts in the love of God and men. Glorious designs! amiable and heavenly intentions! May the Divine Spirit crown them with success, and pour his blessing upon our souls. It shall be my endeavour, therefore, in the following discourse; first, to explain the general and various causes of dissensions and quarrels; and then to enforce

force the manly and excellent precept contained in the words of the text.

First, to explain the general causes of contentions, I believe I may be justified if I refer them to these two primary and efficient causes; pride and avarice: for all the long catalogue of human vices; however varied, divided, and subdivided, will be ultimately found, only different modifications of these cardinal vices. Would you, therefore ask, what it is that disturbs the peace of society? what lifts the legal magistrate to a tyrant? what unsheaths the sword of war to desolate nations? what disturbs the harmony of individuals? sets neighbour against neighbour, and brother against brother? I would answer, that pride and avarice are at the bottom, and that the whole mischief originates from these unworthy dispositions.

But I would wish to observe, by the way, that both these passions, the one a general object of contempt, the other of detestation, are very nearly allied, and implanted, originally in the heart by the great God of nature himself; the one as a spur to industry
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and science; and the other, as a guard against every mean and ungenerous deed. God at first created man upright; but he has since sought out, and found many wicked inventions: he has corrupted the fountain of moral action, and no wonder that the streams issuing therefrom are found so very destructive to the virtue, peace, and happiness of mankind.

By the pride, I would wish to reprobate; I mean that passion (varied, indeed, according to the circumstance of individuals, but still going on upon the same principle) which, instead of guarding, directly aims at the destruction of all the virtues; and by way of explanation, I shall instance a few cases, in which it is found peculiarly hurtful to societies and individuals. And, first, that of the ruler of a people, fixed upon by the general suffrage; or like Saul and David of old, chosen of the Lord. Gratitude, to a people who have raised him from a cottage to a throne; adorned him with the ensigns of royalty, parted with a considerable portion of their own rights to enlarge his prerogative; and to render him more respectable

able in the community, allowed him men fingers and women fingers, and the delights of the children of men; for a while, may perhaps restrain him within the bounds of justice and propriety. So much justice may remain with him, that at the first exercise of his power, he may "set them to ear his ground, to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war; nor take their fields and their vineyards, and their olive yards; even the best of them, and give them to his servants." I. Sam. viii. He may not for a while, under pretence of a zeal for religion; "Hew Agag in pieces before the Lord:" Nay, for a while, he may refrain from taking away the poor man's lamb, "which he had bought and nourished up, grew up together with him and his children, which did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." Though for a time he may be so moderate, as not to cause his subjects, nor even his enemies, "to be cut with saws and with harrows of iron, and with axes," Chron. xx. 3.

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Yet the moment that this unworthy passion lays hold of him, it will generate ambition; ambition a lust of power, and avarice will come in to give a sanction to the whole proceeding; and then, God preserve us from the horrible consequence. The shrieks of suffering innocence; the cries of the orphan, the tears of the defenceless widow, weigh nothing in the balance against regal pride, ripened into ambition, and rendered callous by avarice. He will think it a derogation from his dignity, for the poor to have any possession in his neighbourhood; or to cultivate a paternal spot in view of his extensive lawns: pride will tell him, that it interrupts his prospects; avarice will inform him, that as he is the center of power, so also that he should be of inheritance: he will, therefore, sue him at the law, and render that the instrument of ruin which was meant as the guardian of life and property; or perhaps he will proceed with more imperial brevity, and like Ahab of old, seize the vineyard, and slay the possessor: for one vice seldom dwells alone;

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it is attended with others, even worse than itself. And, with respect to national disputes; we may venture to affirm; that in consequence of the most trifling disputes, suggested by pride, such as the acknowledgment of titles, or points of precedence, as many lives have been sacrificed as there are men on the face of the whole earth: this is not a light consideration; and the princes and rulers of the people should look to it.

And we may also add, that the avarice of a few individuals, or a few private commercial people, by encroaching upon the property of neighbouring states, or by carrying on an illicit trade with their subjects, have too often plunged whole nations in all the horrors and desolations of war.

From the pride and avarice of kings and nations let us descend, and see, whether the same principles do not operate, in their respective proportions, among the rich men of the land, and even in the humblest walks of private life. The rich court the smiles of those in power; while they in turn lord it over
their

their inferiors, who feel that their masters profusion must be nourished with the sweat of their industry. Avarice bids them hazard their fortune upon the laws of chance, which in turn often brings on poverty, which is again remedied by being bribed to serve the man of power; while pride sickens for a title, and to walk abroad adorned with the trappings of nobility, at the expence of every generous, manly, and virtuous sentiment. Let us quit these haunts, and examine the humbler scenes of life; and here we shall find the disagreeable truth confirmed, that in his proportion, every man is a tyrant, unless by care and attention, or a finer temperament of heart, his soul is meliorated by justice and humanity; that love of independence so natural to man, hurries him on in the paths of gain; and it is not always the case, that a sense of justice and truth can over-rule the calls of avarice, or guard him against the violation of his neighbour's property. It will be all well he thinks, if towards the close of life, he devotes a portion of the money gained, to some charitable purpose

purpose. Add to this, that pride will come in for his share; it will teach him to assume an importance, and superiority that he has no right to. Avarice has already, we will suppose, procured him riches at the expence of equity, or at least of generosity; and an importance of situation, or a popularity of character, must be obtained, even by the sacrifice of benevolence and every christian charity. No matter he thinks if the reputation of his friend is offered up, on the altar of defamation, his own rises higher on the ruins: he expects uncommon attention and respect, he looks for the bow of humility, or the incense of adulation; without these he sickens, life becomes a burden to him, and sleep will depart from his pillow. A very remarkable instance we have of this in Haman. One would have thought that he had every thing the heart of man could wish for; every possible ingredient of happiness, that this life could supply. No, there was a canker which destroyed his peace, and embittered his enjoyments; Mordecai, the Jew, who
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was a poor exile in a strange land, sat in the king's gate, and revered him not. And this was all that destroyed the ~~o~~economy of this man's happiness; he recapitulates to his family his greatness, the number of his children, his favour with the king: nay more, he was the only one, beside the king, invited to the queen's banquet; yet all these availed him nothing, so long as he saw Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. Pride had taken full possession of his soul; and we find, by the event, that justice, tenderness, and every spark of humanity, were utterly destroyed in him; for I must again repeat, that where pride and avarice are become predominant, all the virtues and graces of religion, every disposition to peace and good will be utterly lost. Where they dwell, the happiness resulting from a sense of doing good; from the consciousness of having relieved distress, or to have snatched the helpless from the hand of the oppressor, will be for ever unfelt; the purest source of rational enjoyment be unknown. From a review of the whole, what are the inferences we have drawn,

drawn? Surely they ought to be exceedingly favourable to a mild, forbearing, and peaceable disposition. The same apostle, in his admonition to the Ephesians, iv. 31. 32. saith "Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another," &c. I have no need to repeat any more texts of scripture to prove this forgiving disposition one of the surest marks of true Christianity. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another, and love is the fulfilling of the law; for where that disposition dwells in its fullest vigour, there can remain no tendency to any acts of rapine, or injustice. But then we live in a wicked world, where one man is endeavouring to impose upon the innocence, or weakness of his neighbour, where we are continually exposed to the malice, ill-nature, and encroachments of those around us; what is to be done? are we to suffer all the inroads of vice and oppression, without one step taken in self-

defence? Even then, if possible, live peaceably; if not, the law is open to watch the life, the property, the reputation of the individual. But still, guard against a litigious, revengeful disposition, nor draw the reins of public justice too tight on the offender. By this shall all know, that we are the followers of the Prince of peace; we shall bear his superscription on our bosom, and assuredly be admitted, in his good time, to that world where the voice of war shall be no more heard; but every spirit be attuned to the sweet notes of happiness and peace.

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to conclude, with the greatest reason, that
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to the war of understanding; but that some

powerful, unseen Being, in the greatest variety
of influence, thwarts their designs, and bluffs

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dom, understanding and integrity delivered up
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riches brought low, and princes driven from
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while poverty has been called from its obscurity

to dwell amongst the honourable of
the earth: I have seen, with his servants upon

He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it; and whose
breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

THE author of this book, whoever he was,
seems to have been a careful and just ob-

server of human nature. After many years
observation and experience, and a judicious

survey of the divine government of the world,
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he concludes, with the greatest reason, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the men of understanding*; but that some powerful, unseen Being, in the greatest variety of instances, thwarts their designs, and blasts all their hopes. He had frequently remarked fools raised into great dignity, and men of wisdom, understanding and integrity delivered up to poverty and scorn: he had again seen greatness brought low, and princes driven from gilded palaces, to seek for refuge in humble cottages. A strange reverse of fortune this! while poverty has been called from its obscure retreats, to dwell amongst the honourable of the earth: *I have seen, saith he, servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth*. He had also observed in moral cases, that the career of vice is often interrupted by some invisible agent; that iniquity often receives a check when it least expects it; and that at one time or other, every wicked act is duly and properly punished. He observes in particular, that wickedness, in several instances, meets an
immediate

immediate punishment; and that disobedience and misery seem linked together as causes and effects. His words in the text are highly expressive of those unseen dangers that attend a course of sin. *He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it, and whose breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.* Those that plan schemes for the ruin and destruction of their innocent neighbours, shall find Providence interesteth itself in their favour, and will punish them for every attempt to break the settled order of the world, and render innocence unhappy. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the case of the ambitious Haman. Blessed, not only with the favour and friendship of his monarch; enjoying every gratification that luxury could hope for, or the smiles of his prince bestow upon him; amidst wealth, grandeur, and magnificence, he grew unhappy and wretched. Mordecai, a servant of God, saw his rising greatness with contempt, and despised impiety and vice, though clothed in purple. Haman perceived it, and meditated the destruction of Mordecai, and all the Jews through the vast provinces of

Perſia. The Jews were ſtrangers, and defenceleſs captives; their enemy rich, powerful, and univerſally dreaded, beloved by his king, and gratified to the utmoſt of his inhuman diſpoſitions. The awful decree was paſſed, the day fixed when they were to be made the ſacrifices of proud ambition, and relentless cruelty. — What hopes were now left to kindle the dying ſparks of gladneſs in their hearts? Driven from their country, ſlaves to heathen enthuſiaſts, and under the awful diſpleaſure of God, could they expect that Heaven would work a miracle in their favour? No; nothing but horror and death appeared on all ſides! But while every thing deſirable in life ſeemed at ſtake; while their politic enemy, with the ſpirit of a Machiavel or a devil, was anticipating with pleaſure and confidence, their ruin and the extirpation of the whole race, a concurrence of unexpected and extraordinary cauſes changed the face of things: that day, which was to be ſtained with the blood of the choſen people of God, was turned into a day of gladneſs and rejoicing; and the impious contriver of this ſcene of blood

finished

finished his wretched existence on the very gallows that he, in his days of greatness and pride, designed for his righteous neighbour. What then are we to deduce from all this? Not surely that Heaven is regardless of the affairs of men; if this was the case, every design, every stratagem, how impious soever, would infallibly succeed, according to the depth of policy in which they are laid. Rather we are to infer from hence that an Almighty Providence observes, the motions and designs of mankind, and when calculated for the advancement of tyranny, oppression and cruelty, kindly interferes and frustrates their schemes. How just then is the observation in the text; the royal preacher had often observed the truth of it; and in several instances, what is here suggested, has been confirmed to us, *He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it.* One remarkable instance in particular, in which the hand of Providence was visibly displayed, and for which gratitude ought to animate every friend to truth, to liberty, and the protestant cause; I say, this instance in particular proves, beyond a doubt, that God

is concerned for our happiness; that the lives of his servants are precious in his sight; that he *watches over them for their good*; that he kindly preserves their liberties, and brings to nought the devices of their enemies. Britain, a land of light and liberty, the glory of the whole earth, and the envy of all other nations; Britain! which bravely struggled against, and broke the yoke of superstition, tyranny, and priestcraft, (thanks be to our forefathers, thanks be to Heaven for concurring in this righteous cause) was once on the point of being sacrificed to the cruelty of the sons of Belial, and of losing all the dear privileges of humanity. The flower of the nation at one horrid blow were to be destroyed; the land to be filled with the mournful cries of widows and orphans; and Christianity to be buried once more under a load of folly, idolatry, and superstition: the gospel, that invaluable legacy of our Saviour, to be torn from us; and we were to resign our necks to the galling yoke, which *neither our fathers nor ourselves were able to bear.*

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The plot was formed with the greatest art and policy; Popery laid the scheme, and Hell seemed to favour the design: the great council of the nation was convened; the train was laid; the horrid intent was ready to be put in execution, in which a worse than savage brutality was to be satiated. — Here let us make a pause, and observe the steps of that good Providence, which presides over the world, and governs it by the invariable laws of equity, righteousness and goodness; observe how it frustrates the aim of wicked men, and often converts it to the noblest purposes. When the nation lay in peaceful and unsuspecting security, enjoying the blessing of peace and plenty, and, I hope, with gratitude recollecting past instances of providential goodness, that religion, which has laid her foundation in blood, was employing her faithful, but impious sons in one of the most execrable designs that ever entered into the heart of man. But Heaven, to whose all-pervading eye the dark corners of iniquity are laid open, saw them lay the scheme, which was to extend the dominion of Satan; he saw
them

them dig a pit for the destruction of their neighbour; he kindly interposed, frustrated the impious attempt, and brought these sons of cruelty and vice to the tribunal of justice; from which had they escaped, had such pests of society gone unpunished, we should have been for ever unworthy the notice of Providence, in not concurring with it to extirpate such monsters from among mankind. Permit me, then, to repeat the sentiment in the text, it has infinite weight and truth in it, *He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it.*

Whatever, therefore, the sons of violence and impiety may hope for; whatever prospects of power, pleasure and affluence may seem to await them, they are all delusions, all the vain creatures of a vitiated imagination; justice will avenge the affronts offered to Heaven; and cruelty, oppression, rapine, and murder, shall certainly one day or other meet their just deserts. Vain is all the skill of a politician to elude the search of Omniscience; and equally vain and frivolous is an arm of flesh, and all human power, to withstand the just vengeance
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of Omnipotence. That infinite Providence which governs the world, by the laws of equity and wisdom, will not suffer iniquity to triumph long, nor suffer the laws of nature to be trampled upon with impunity. No; *he that diggeth a pit, to catch unwary innocence, shall himself fall into it; and he that breaketh a hedge, violates the right of others; in the allegorical words of the Royal Preacher, a serpent shall bite him.* Thus the God of Heaven carefully observes the conduct of mankind, permits them to act agreeable to the laws of moral liberty; but whenever they violate the laws of righteousness, the laws of his government, he will certainly punish them. We were not made to live at random, and to obey every dictate of unruly passion; this is entirely inconsistent with the schemes of Providence. He created us to be happy, and designed that every individual should proportionably contribute to heighten and confirm the happiness of the whole, and to this end gave us a law; which, if properly observed and duly obeyed, brings safety, peace, plenty, and virtue in her train: but if neglected,

or

or even partially obeyed, entails misery on mankind. And if the disobedience were general, nothing but fraud, violence, rapine, and mutual distrust would prevail. And this is the sanction of this law of Heaven, that every attempt to contradict its designs is attended with great inconvenience, and a proper punishment.

SERMON

S E R M O N XXII.

ROMANS XII. 17.

Recompense to no man evil for evil.

IN the conduct of human life, in order to act with propriety, it is necessary to examine the end, or consequences of our actions. But though this maxim appears self-evident, and a due attention to it, the only basis of social happiness and security, yet if we take a view of the world, of men, and manners; we shall find, I am persuaded, that most of those vices that disgrace our fellow creatures, flow not so much from a badness of heart, or

a natural propensity to evil, as from an indolence of mind, or a prevailing inattention to the rule of fitness. They fancy they can attain a sufficient knowledge of the rule of life, by a kind of intuition, or a moral sense, determining without the assistance of thought and reflection, what is right and fit to be done; thus paying the passions a compliment at the expence of reason, and all the noblest principles of humanity. In some instances it must be owned, that the passions are a sufficient rule of life, as cases of benevolence, tenderness and love. The good heart wants no stimulus to appear god-like, to relieve the wants of distress, to heal the wounds of affliction, to screen the widow and the orphan from the fangs of unrelenting oppression, and unfeeling avarice. But it is a hard lesson in the school of morality and religion, and requires the strongest exertion of our reason to comport ourselves to that rule of life, inculcated by the apostle in my text; *recompense no man evil for evil*. The mind, unused to the necessary restraints of religion and reason, is here ready to cry out; *it is a*
hard

hard saying, who can bear it? what, is the quiet and inoffensive part of mankind to be insulted at large? and is forbearance still to plead for the offender? Am I not agreeable to the received notions of equity, to demand *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*; to pursue the object of my resentment to destruction, who has before assayed my ruin? Thus argues the man who has not subjected his passions to the restraints of reason and humanity. A great deal, however, may be said for him, and many specious and plausible arguments might be produced to explode the precept in the text. At present, however, we shall postpone giving him an answer, till we have attended to the pleas of some others. And, if the politician steps forth, He who weighs the actions of individuals, and the public in the scales of convenience and self-interest, to arraign the wisdom of the apostle's sentiment. Let us hear him, and weigh his arguments with candour. He would observe, that in the government of states, justice is of all the most indispensable principle; that, in order to keep

keep up a proper equipoise in society; it is necessary that the characters of its constituents should be known, and when known, be treated accordingly. Such executive justice is necessary to suppress villainy and oppression, as well as the distributive, to animate the useful and the good; otherwise the end of society is destroyed. Thus punishment becomes necessary, in order to secure the general welfare. So also with respect to the conduct of one state to another; avarice and ambition will not leave mankind long to enjoy the sweets of peace. The avaricious will encroach, the ambitious sow the seed of discord in the cabinet of princes; set nation against nation; break the harmony of the world; and destroy, for a time, the cement of humanity. Thus, as in the first case, we must repay the private offender, *evil for evil*, in order to render government really useful, by preserving the bulk of the people in the possession of their lives and properties: so, also, in the latter case it becomes necessary to render *evil for evil*, in order

to preserve ourselves from the rage of conquest and tyranny. Thus far the argument is conducted on principles of equity and religion, and by no means affects the wisdom and divinity of the apostle's sentiment: for Christian forbearance is not a tame and servile principle, which requires us to bow the neck to any yoke, that the humour of another is pleased to lay upon it. Religion requires us to conceal no real principles of nature; it bids us, on the contrary, to exert them on every proper occasion. We are not to suffer like thieves and murderers; it bids us *be angry*, but *sin not*; i. e. not permit our anger to degenerate into revenge or malice. But he goes on from these general rules of government; in a variety of cases, it becomes necessary to dispense with all the rules of justice, as well as truth; (this is not an exaggerated picture, or representation, but the too common maxim of worldly policy) hence *fraud* becomes necessary to hide the intentions of states; and when once an enemy has been extraordinary for his

abilities to guide the helm of state, or remarkably successful in executing its plans, that it is our business to destroy, without any regard to principle, and act uniformly on that Machiavelian principle, *that all is well that ends well*. Such, indeed, are the too common practices of those who have the management of public affairs; but though they may sometime prove successful in the end, yet they can be supported neither by the principles of humanity nor sound policy: For, first, if such principles were to become general, all government must soon be subverted by a general distrust: And, secondly, every state, sooner or later would, by such practices, fall to contempt and infamy, and not only despised, but obnoxious to all surrounding nations; so that the Apostle's sentiment appears not only consistent with the firmest policy, but perfective of human government in general.

Recompence to no man evil for evil, is the sentiment of every generous mind, they can overlook

look the past conduct of an enemy in distress, and instead of repaying them with the bitterness of revenge, we have seen instances, when a kind and benevolent spirit has raised an enemy from the pit of destruction. However, the practice of repaying evil for evil is in no wise reconcileable to humanity, religion, or reason. Religion expressly forbids it, under the most awful penalties. *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.* Besides, humanity, with the greatest justice might be said to suffer long and to be kind, &c. And by a kind and generous forgiveness we may make a friend of him, who, by a contrary behaviour, might be driven to extremes.

But let us hear another objection to this amiable doctrine. The lawyer, who sits in the seat of judgment, as the instrument of distributive and executive justice; he observes, that all public security depends on a vigorous exertion of the laws, and that person who puts

up with a legal injury, is pernicious to society, giving, as it were, a countenance to the violation of public justice. And, indeed, there is one very notable clause in our legal institutions that is not only pervertive of the exercise of forgiveness, but highly injurious to society; I mean that act which renders, what is called *compounding of felony*, one of the most atrocious affronts against the authority of the laws. In some cases this may be a dangerous indulgence, but in general, nothing can redound more to the welfare of individuals. What, for instance, can be more tyrannical than to force a kind and generous spirit to prosecute another for depriving him of a small part of his property to death? whereas, if the injured person was permitted (according to the laws of God) to receive an equivalent for the injury, it would answer all the purposes of justice. And whereas, his death deprives the injured of all means of redress; gives a kind spirit no satisfaction, and robs society of a member, which in time might become useful; it is evident that
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the liberty to exercise forgiveness in this respect, would upon the whole, tend to the promoting, rather than the disparagement of public good.

So that the utmost that these two casuists can produce in objection to the Apostle's precept is, that in society, justice must be vigorously executed; which, by the way, admits of many exceptions by their own conduct, for in many cases they find it absolutely necessary to soften public justice by mercy and compassion. However, *to do justly*, no sentiment of religion forbids, but on the contrary, enforces it in the strongest manner, making the condition of salvation to consist in the exercise of piety towards God, with justice and humanity towards our fellow-creatures. *And what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*; or as the latter part of the text expresses it, *provide things honest (or just) in the sight of all men*. But all that has been said is no objection to the sentiment advanced in the text; for there

is this important difference between doing justice to an offender, and *recompensing evil for evil*; the one is, in most cases absolutely necessary, and in none properly sinful; the other is in no instance to be justified: for what is to be understood by the expression, *recompense to no man evil for evil*? does it mean that executive justice should be banished society, or that it should be executed by none but him to whom vengeance belongeth? by no means, for kings and magistrates are, in some measure, the instruments of divine justice upon earth; they are necessary to stop the growth of vice, and to establish peace among mankind. What then are we to understand by the expression? If you are unjustly treated, despoiled of your property or reputation, seek not redress from your enemy, by acting upon the same principles; that is, *repay not evil for evil*. If your character suffers by the injurious tongue of scandal, do not calumniate in your turn; transgress not truth, in order to revenge yourselves of the affront: but supported

ported by the consciousness of not deserving such a treatment, by a resentment that may not exceed the bounds of Christian moderation and forbearance, clear yourselves to the impartial world. Or by a mild and forgiving disposition, *overcome evil with good*. Be sure not to toss the ball of scandal in your turn, for that would be acting upon principles that you condemn in your adversary; or, in the Apostle's words, *recompensing evil for evil*. Again, if the hand of oppression and injustice lays you low, it is fit and proper to seek redress from the dispensers of justice; otherwise, by too soft and easy compliance with the caprice of others, all distinction of character and conduct would be destroyed, and the regulations of society rendered useless. But what we are to take heed of, when the balance of power is in our own hands, is not to convert it to the purposes of revenge and oppression; for that, as I have already observed, would be acting upon those principles which we complain of and profess to abhor. Hear what the Apostle

says, in verse 19, 'dearly beloved avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;' for it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." So that upon the whole, it appears that the commandment in the text has no tendency to cancel the idea, or prevent the execution of justice, but rather to prevent a litigious, morose, ill-natured, and revengeful disposition; to unite mankind by bands of mutual forbearance, tenderness, and love; to induce them to behave towards each other, as members of the same great family, the children of the same father, and candidates for the same blessedness. The more, therefore, we act upon these principles, the more we conform to the sentiment of the Apostle, the more happy mankind would be. The less they attend to it, the less virtue, the less justice, humanity, and hope there will be in the world. I shall, therefore conclude, with that admirable precept of religion, contained in the text and succeeding verses. "Recompence to no man evil for evil, provide things honest in
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the fight of all men; if it be possible, live at peace with all men; therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

SERMON

108
S E R M O N XXIII.

A C T S XVI. 23.

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he, and all his, straightway.

BY a candid examination of the history of the gospel, we shall find that it has suffered more from the selfish interested views of mankind, than from any other cause whatsoever: its progress is more retarded, and its heavenly doctrines more perverted by this, than by any other principle. Were the professors of Christianity to indulge an open disposition; if in the violent pursuit of pleasure, or profit, they breathed one sincere sigh, one honest

honest humane wish for the happiness of their fellow-creatures: if the spirit of him they call lord and master, who never saw an object of real distress, but he reached forth the arm of compassion to relieve him, did but animate their bosoms; those extended regions, peopled with slaves and savages, where ignorance and unsocial barbarity level the human with the brute creation, would have ere this, been cultivated by the fair hands of peace, of knowledge, and of virtue, and been rendered smiling as the gardens of God.

But even Britons, the sons of liberty and science, and the dread of tyrants, here in their turn, lord it over the heritage of Heaven, and instead of carrying the glad tidings of the gospel to those benighted regions; urged on by avarice, carry desolation, rapine, and tyranny, and plant the vices of Britain in the soil of India. It is the self-interested views of its professors that prevent the heavenly current of Christian knowledge from refreshing all the corners of the earth.

The innocence and slavery of the Indians are the gain of their proud masters; and like the spirit of divination in the damsel mentioned in this chapter, must by no means be dispossessed; otherwise the hope of their gain is gone! Does not the parallel strike every mind, between the conduct of these ancient Heathens, and our modern Christians, who deprive beings designed for immortality, of the knowledge of their religion, which is the greatest blessing bestowed on mankind; for we find, that the only cause which these ancient Heathens had, to quarrel with these preachers of righteousness was, that the hope of their gain was gone; and they immediately made use of a scruple of religious conscience, to persecute Paul and Silas. For, when the masters of the damsel, who had the spirit of divination saw, that the hope of their gains was gone; they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place, unto the rulers, saying, "these men being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being

being Romans. Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" by this craft we get our livelihood. Religion was soon brought as the subject of the dispute, in order to screen an iniquitous design; and upon this, the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates rent off their cloaths, and commanded them to be beaten; and when they had so done, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely. But the great God who knows how to bring good out of evil; made this a step to convert a whole household to the faith; and it was brought about in so astonishing a manner, and with such evident proofs of Divine power, that the keeper of the prison, came in trembling, and fell down before Paul, &c. and said; "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. We see here the dawnings of a

Christian

Christian spirit, an humane feeling for the distresses of others.

My reasons for choosing this portion of scripture, for the subject of the present discourse, is to examine into the ancient design of baptism, the manner in which it was performed, and the subjects proper for baptism. And in pursuit of these examinations, I shall endeavour to shew, that immersion; or, as it is often called, plunging, is not the ancient and scriptural method of baptism: or, first, that baptism is an institution borrowed from the Jewish church. Secondly, that it is an emblematical, or figurative act. Thirdly, that it may, in a great measure, be regarded as a succeeding rite to circumcision. Fourthly, that as infants are capable of the privileges of the gospel, as well as the children of the Jews were those of the covenant, they are also capable of the initiating rite of baptism, as well as the rite of circumcision. First, that baptism is an institution, borrowed from the Jewish church. It is proper to observe here, that in
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all the dispensations of Providence, there is an analogy, or similitude; that the general design of Providence, under every dispensation, and by its institution, is to make his creatures happy, wise, and good; and that the only methods to make them wise and good, and consequently happy, is to suit the means to their circumstances and capacities. In consequence of these reasonings, we find that the Almighty, under the Jewish dispensation, treated them as children; as incapable of a refined, abstract, and spiritual worship; and suited their religion to their capacities: he ordained a vast variety of rites and ceremonies, all at the same time highly significant and emblematic. They carried in their flesh a mark, (circumcision) or sign of the covenant made with Abraham; and as a testimony that they were a distinct people, chosen of the Lord, separated from the idolatrous Heathen, and devoted to the worship of one only true and living God: And there was super-added to this another very significant rite, that

that of baptism, which was a sign of their being clean, and holy to the Lord. So that under the new dispensation, baptism has the same general meaning and intent, as under the old; and signifies no more, than that a person is made holy, or consecrated to the worship of one Supreme God, and Father Almighty, and an emblem of that purity of intention, that uprightness of heart, that holiness, or cleanness from moral defilement, which is required of every Christian. So that our Saviour established in his church no new rite or ceremony, but only continued two of the ancient rites. I mean Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Baptism, as I have already observed, to succeed circumcision; and the Lord's Supper, no more than the eating of the passover, with the object or intention changed. Let us, saith the apostle, keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Since, therefore, neither our Saviour nor the Baptist, instituted the rite of baptism,
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but only adopted an ancient ceremony, it is worth while to observe the manner in which it was performed in the Old Testament: and it is highly necessary for us still to carry in our minds, that under the Old and New Testament it is constantly regarded as a figurative, purifying rite.

The Apostle to the Hebrews informs us, in what the Jewish dispensation consisted. Heb. vii. 10. That it stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances. Where diverse washings may, and ought to have been rendered, divers baptisms, various sorts or modes of baptism. And we find, from a proper examination of the rites of the Old Testament; that these divers baptisms consisted chiefly in sprinkling; pouring out water; and sometimes, but very seldom, in plunging the whole body under water: and farther, that when a person was sprinkled, or had water poured out upon him, it was always done by a priest; whereas, when the latter was made use of, it

was the person's own act, no priest had any hand in it; so that the person plunged or baptized himself.

I have already observed, that the constant idea affixed to baptism, under the old and new dispensation, was that of purifying or cleansing. Under the Christian, how were believers cleansed or separated from unbelievers? by baptism. Under the old; how were the priests and Levites purified and separated to the Lord? in the same manner; not by plunging, but by sprinkling. Numb. viii. 6. 7. "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them:" And the law was only a figure of the good things of the gospel; Heb. ix. 9. "Which was a figure for the time then present:" Heb. xi. "For the law having a shadow of good things to come." And, again, Heb. viii. 5. "Who serve unto the example, and shadow of heavenly things." I say, the law was a type of the gospel, and
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its rites a figure of the institutions of the Christian religion; we may then infer that Christians are, as St. Peter, 1 Epist. ii. 5. observes; a spiritual household, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices; are to be cleansed and set apart from unbelievers, by the same ceremony as the priests under the law were to be set apart by baptism, or the sprinkling water of purifying upon them.

Again, when any of the Jews became unclean by touching a dead body, a bone, or a grave; the method instituted by God for cleansing or purifying, was: "He shall purify himself on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean; the water of separation shall be sprinkled upon him, and this was to be a statute for ever." When Moses set apart, or consecrated the Jewish people, he made an offering, and sprinkled the blood upon the people; and St. Paul alludes to this; speaking of wine in the holy supper, which was an emblem, &c. This is the blood of the New Testament, shed

or poured, &c. If we examine the 52d chapter of Ifaiah, we shall find an evident prophecy, concerning the baptism of the Christian world. And Ezekiel, chap. 36, strongly alludes to that rite. "I will take you from among the heathen. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean." And when the chosen people were led out of Egypt, they were not only sprinkled with water, and the blood of beasts; but as the Apostle to the Corinthians observes; they were all baptized unto Moses, by the cloud, and by the sea: no advocate for dipping can, from this passage, assert they were overwhelmed by a cloud, or plunged in the sea. The sea went back, and they passed over upon dry land: and the only idea we can form of being baptized by a cloud, must be, that the sea, by its violent agitation, threw up such a watry mist, as resembles a gentle shower: and instead of incommoding, their passage, in that sultry climate, refreshed them.

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From these considerations, it is very evident, that sprinkling, or pouring out water upon persons and things, was the antient rite of consecration: the method by which they were made clean and holy to the Lord; and also a ceremony of initiating a heathen within the pale of the Christian church. The Apostle, terms these sprinklings, baptisms, as I have already observed; and they were always considered as such by the writers of the New Testament. The intention, or moral affixed to the idea of baptism, under the Christian dispensation, is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh one after me, who shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire." The prophet Joel beautifully foretels the effusion of the spirit, under the emblem of the early and latter rain: and 1 John, Epist. ii. expressly calls the Holy Ghost, represented by the baptismal water; the unction, or anointing. Baptism, by sprinkling, or pouring, is a significant and lively emblem of this unction; whereas, in

the mode of dipping, this part of the allusion is lost.

John was baptized in Enon, because there was much water ; but this does not imply that he baptized the multitude by dipping, for there were many other necessary and important uses for many waters in that place, besides dipping the multitude. Other weighty and just causes, why John should choose this well-watered and fruitful country, for the scene of his ministrations. Let it be considered how valuable and scarce water was in those parts ; how hot the climate ! how numerous the crouds, which flocked to John's baptism ! from what distant parts they came ! how long they tarried to hear his instructions ! for the mere act of baptism, was the least part of John's mission, and the people's end in flocking to him. Let these things be considered, and there will appear many reasons why he should choose this part for the place of his preaching, &c. and it may not be here improper to observe, that several circumstances were unfavourable

vourable to the dipping of the people in this place; we cannot well suppose they were all naked; that they had all a change of raiment, undressed, and put on dry apparel is improbable, from the vastness of the multitude; the openness of the country, and the great distance whence they came; and that they stood in their wet garments to hear John's doctrine, and travelled in them many miles to their home, is absurd. Nor will the circumstance of Philip and the eunuch, going down unto the water, and coming up from it, prove that he there dipped him. For, as waters run in valleys, they might go down from the chariot to the rivulet, (for geographers find but little streams there) and be baptized, by pouring water; and from thence go up to the chariot again, in the most perfect consistence with this account of the matter. So when the people of Judea, are said to be baptized of John, in the river Jordan; and that Jesus, when baptized came out, or from the water: it by no means appears

that they were plunged under it; for it being the custom in those countries to wear only sandals on their feet, and washing these being among them a very delightful and familiar thing; the going into the water to have it poured on their heads, is extremely natural and probable. Can it be supposed that the jailor and his whole family, who were taught, converted, and baptized about midnight, without any previous preparation for the ceremony, had it done by dipping? especially as Saul, from fasting, was so much enfeebled, and as it was in the depth of winter. And, lastly, can it be supposed, that the 3000 mentioned, Acts ii. 41. were converted and plunged in one day? we may conclude therefore, as water under the Jewish law, was used as figurative of moral purity, and in the Christian ceremony of baptism adopted from that usage; and sprinkling being the only way in which a priest was ever known to use it; that it was the practice of John, who was of a priestly race, and of others

others who baptized, not to have plunged men under water, but sprinkle or pour water on them, according to the familiar practice of that rite in the church. What remains of this subject to be discussed, must be reserved for another opportunity.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

A C T S XVI. 33.

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

IN the former part of this discourse, we endeavoured to shew, that baptism is an institution, borrowed from the Jewish church; and an emblematical, or figurative act. It remains now to prove, that it ought to be regarded, as a succeeding rite to circumcision; and that infants are capable of the privileges of the gospel, as well as the children of the Jews of the privileges of the covenant. Circumcision was the initiating rite under the
Old

Old Testament; for the covenant is called the covenant of circumcision; and circumcision on the other hand, is called, Rom. iv. 11. the seal of the righteousness of faith; faith, or faithful obedience, being the condition of the covenant, which God made with Abraham. It also signified the circumcision of the heart; Deut. x. 16. and xxx. 6. Rom. ii. 28, 29. It answered every end as properly and effectually under the law, as baptism does under the gospel. Circumcision, therefore, could not be a type of baptism, but was merely succeeded by it, as one absolute ordinance, or positive institution, does in the place of another. Besides, baptism is itself of Jewish institution, under the Old Testament; and by consequence could not be typified by circumcision: nay, they were sometimes used together in the Jewish church, and made the ceremony of initiating profelytes under the law; as our Saviour made it the only ceremony of initiating profelytes under the gospel.

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I shall now proceed to the last thing proposed, which is to shew, that infants are capable of the privileges of the gospel, as well as the children of the Jews of the privileges of the covenant. God commanded infants to be circumcised, as well as adult persons; and surely, if they are capable of circumcision, they are also capable of baptism. For the two covenants of circumcision and baptism, are in substance the same, and therefore if the initiation of infants was then no absurdity, it can be none now; especially if they were admitted into the church, when the entrance was more grievous, and not without blood, how unreasonable is it to assert, that they are now incapable of admission into it, when the entrance is made easy, and more agreeable to the weakness of a tender creature? It is said, that infants are incapable of baptism, because they cannot answer the ends of it; they cannot understand the gospel, or profess their faith, or submit to baptism out of their own choice; nor can they have their faith and hope farther strengthened

strengthened in the use of it. This way of arguing appears to me rather weak and fallacious, because it makes no distinctions between a strict institution by God, for one or a few ends, and precisely for persons of one sort; and an institution of latitude, for several ends, and for different sorts of persons, differently qualified for those several ends. Our Saviour was baptized, who was less capable of baptism than infants possibly can be; for John baptized with the baptism of salvation, and thereby sealed to the people the remission of their sins. Now our Saviour was without sin, and yet he was baptized: which shews that a man, who is capable of some ends of baptism, may be baptized, though he be not capable of the rest. It is moreover reflecting on the wisdom of God, because God commanded children to be circumcised; though all the ends of circumcision could not be answered by them; and there lies the same objection against infant circumcision as against infant baptism. And as children are capable
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of the benefits and privileges of Christianity, why should not the sign of those benefits and privileges be applied to them; as Isaac was circumcised and entered into the covenant, before he was able to understand what the terms of the covenant were: And will any man say he was circumcised in vain, or that God commanded a foolish thing.

The Anabaptists allow, that the New Testament does not exclude infants, by an express prohibition; but they pretend it was Christ's intention, that none but grown persons should be baptized; because the gospel requires that persons to be baptized, should be taught. The reason to me appears plain; it was necessary the doctrines of the gospel should be preached to adults; and the ceremony of baptism proved that they received those doctrines; but when they were initiated by it, and Christianity gained ground among them, it was not necessary that their children should wait till they were grown up before they were baptized: as from their infancy they were to be instructed

instructed in Christian doctrines, and the rite of baptism of course could not be too early made use of, were it only as a pledge or confirmation of that religion; and it can no more be proved that grown persons only should be baptized, from the requisition in the gospel that persons to be baptized, should be taught, than that from the Apostles words, 2 Thes. iii. 10. none but grown persons should eat; for he says: "If any would not work, neither should they eat;" and children from their incapability, would of course be denied it. Had God, in the days of David, ordered some prophets, to go and preach the law to all nations, saying, he that believeth, and is circumcised, and baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned; would these have circumcised and baptized only grown persons, contrary to the practice of the Jewish church? had twelve men preached the gospel in the Indies; saying, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: would those men, bred up in the practice of infant baptism, think

think it was God's intention, that infants should be excluded? certainly not, and by a parity of reason, the Apostles could not so understand their commission, as to baptize none but grown persons. Since, therefore, our Saviour has not expressly, or otherwise excluded infants; but by his command to baptize all comprehended them; we must conclude, that it was extended to children, as well as actual believers. The opposers of this opinion, put the greatest stress upon the words of our Saviour, Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but if they were to consider the next words, they would find that infants are not at all concerned in them, because it follows; "but he that believeth not shall be damned." The same want of faith, which here excludes them from baptism, must also exclude them from salvation. Wherefore it is plain, that the believing or not-believing in that text, ought only to be understood of such, as are in a capacity of hearing and believing

believing the gospel; that is, of grown persons just as the words of John iii. 36. He that believeth on the son of God hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him.

Farther, what are we to understand by the apostolic commission, go and preach the gospel to all creatures, if children, as well as grown persons are not included? the children of believers were reckoned a part of the church, and a portion of the inheritance of Jesus; and they may be considered as such with a great deal of propriety; for as they grew up in stature and in knowledge, under the care of tender believing parents, they grew up also in the belief and practice of Christianity. Lydia was baptized and her household; it is at least probable, that some of them were too young to understand the mysteries of the gospel; and the Syriac translation renders the passage: "And Lydia was baptized and her children."

The point in dispute, if properly understood and known as it ought, is not whether infants

are capable of baptism; but whether any person, whatever age he is of, is capable of it, unless he has a full comprehensive knowledge of the Christian scheme of redemption. And how very few of those who are declared fit for baptism by our adversaries, can give us a reason of the hope that is in them? How very few of them can give us a reason why they believe, rather not believe the gospel? How very few men, as well as the most inexperienced child, who need not to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God? I would ask, in the next place, what advantages arise from baptizing grown persons, superior to infant baptism? Do the truths of Christianity appear in a stronger light, or comes it to the heart with greater conviction to him that is baptized when he is old, than to him who has received it in his infancy? Does the obligation of holy living, of a circumspect and virtuous conversation, appear stronger to the one, or the other, purely on account of the difference in the times of their baptism? Is one more acceptable to
God?

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God? or, in other words; is either a better Christian on this account? I apprehend no one will be absurd enough to assert, that this is the case. As the Apostle Paul hath shewn, neither the circumcision of the Jew, nor baptism of the Christian, would stand him in any stead; unless their conduct corresponded to their profession, and they preserved a conscience void of offence.

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S E R M O N

S E R M O N XXV.

J O B VI. 14.

To him that is afflicted, pity should be shewed from
his friend.

SUCH is the state of men in this life ;
their days loaded with a variety of troubles
and distresses ; so precarious their enjoyments ;
so uncertain their hopes ; that there is a
constant demand for the exertion of the
friendly and humane affections. But while
we view the circle of human woe, we may
easily

easily observe that the tear of compassion and friendship alleviates our grief, and softens our sorrow; we find some relief from the pity of surrounding friends, even when we are laid upon the bed of languishing and pain: and since this is the case; since we have it in our power to administer some comfort to our fellow-creatures, under the burthen of affliction, it then naturally becomes a duty; for, to him that is afflicted, pity should be shewn from his friend. But what is this tribute we should pay to affliction? does it consist in a melancholy countenance, or a momentary tear, or the parade of outward mourning? Form, and custom require this; pride may shew such a pity as this to its friend; and the world is seldom backward to exhibit such proofs of sorrow. But in general, mankind wear little more than the semblance of grief, while pity is perhaps a stranger to their breasts. The priest and Levite, when they saw the condition of the man, in the parable, that had fallen among thieves, could not, perhaps entirely suppress the warm

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feelings

feelings of humanity; they doubtless felt some emotions of pity. But it was the good Samaritan alone, that realized, and displayed the excellence of this divine affection. He, with a soul truly great, a stranger to the rancour of party, viewed him as an object of compassion and pity; he considered him as a man, and as such demanding all offices of tenderness and friendship; he considered himself not as pursuing his own interest, distinct from that of all others; but as a link of the vast chain which holds the world together, to the happiness of which he ought to contribute as to a fund from which his own arose. But how very different from this the general conduct of mankind! if fortune smile upon us, if wealth and honor are the companions of our lives; we hail the prosperity of each other; we crowd to sound forth our praises, and intrude our good offices where they are neither asked for, nor wanted. Riches and power want not the assistance of understanding and virtue to command friends, or establish a character; the fawning tribes will overlook

look their folly, soften their vices, and give a reputation without any foundation in wisdom and truth. But if circumstances are changed, we change the whole scene also; and he who was the child of fortune, who lived in ease, affluence and honour, is brought to the valley of affliction, surrounded with neglect and piteous insult. This then is the season to exert our offices of friendship; this is the time to shew esteem, and prove useful; not by mere assurances of good will, not by uttering sentences of pity, which the head remembers more than the heart feels, and which serve more to point out happiness rather than to remove it; but by an actual endeavour, a real exertion, however trifling, to do good, and improve our dispositions, on principles just and benevolent.

This change of attention to each other, with a change of circumstances is too common not to be daily observed; and those who have known such reverses in life, have reason to cry out with Job; "My brethren, my friends

have dealt deceitfully; as a brook, and as a stream of brooks they pass away. They will return no more to his house, neither shall his place know them any more. The paths of their way are turned aside, they see his casting down and are afraid."

The offices of benevolence are evidently our duty. It is the voice of nature that "to him that is afflicted, pity should be shewn from his friend." Not the mere passion, but pity ripened to acts of beneficence and charity. The use I would therefore make of this portion of scripture is, to encourage a spirit of benevolence in all of us; for whatever humane impression the Almighty has left upon our hearts; yet like other passions which lead to virtue, without our own constant endeavours to refresh and confirm them, they are too apt to be weakened by indolence, or overpowered by self-interested regards, and our views are often imperfect and often sullied by ill-directed passions. We can never, therefore habituate ourselves too much to the cultivation

tivation of such dispositions, as constitute what it is called in the gospel, charity; the most striking, the most amiable characteristic of the religion of Jesus; of human nature itself. Upon this occasion, while we are commemorating a mournful instance of affliction and sorrow, a heavy and grievous dispensation in a family; can it be thought useless to inculcate so necessary a principle as pity? Can we look back and view a family absorbed in affliction; a good father and mother languishing on the bed of sickness, surrounded by a helpless and numerous offspring; and at last with that reluctance which arises from parental affection, quitting their hold of life; consigned to the bed of earth, amidst the tears of helpless orphans and sympathizing friends. Can we look back on such an instance of affliction, without compassion, and a wish to do all in our power to assist them? indulge it then; it is a humane, a divine passion, that never leads astray to the paths of dissipation, folly or sin; but on the contrary refines the heart,

heart, eases it of the tumult of irregular desires; humanizes every sentiment, clears the mind from every bias of reuenge, malice, or ill-nature; and consecrates it to the exercise of every manly and heavenly virtue. So that with the highest reason, the Royal Preacher affirms, that it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting. The house of feasting may produce a momentary rapture; it may make the eyes to sparkle and the heart to be joyous: but amidst jollity and noise, our virtues may be weakened; and how often has it happened, when passion has lost the curb of reason, that every principle of religion, prudence, justice, and compassion, have been lost in the bustle of company, and the hurry of ill-managed merriment! But in the house of mourning, the heart receives every impression that is calculated to make it act with reason, humanity, candour, and religion.

Let us then converse with affliction; for, however unwilling, it is what we must all do, sooner

sooner or later; it is a subject that will one day or other exercise the prudence, the courage and virtue of each of us; for man is born to affliction, and from trouble none of us can be exempted; but we shall all be tried and exercised thereby. Then how pleasing will be the look of compassion? what relief will then the smallest offices of friendship be to us? And if such be our sentiments, when lost in trouble and affliction ourselves; we must conclude, that the distressed have a claim upon us, for all the good we can render them. The objects of our compassion in particular at this time, are a train of young and helpless orphans. The house of feasting all around them utters forth its joy, and merriment; and resounds with the effusions of hearts at ease, while they feel no enjoyment, but go heavily along, burdened with sorrow and grief for the loss of their only support, their tender and affectionate parents.

Let these considerations inspire us with a generous pity for them, and let us consider
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that pity, not as an act of generosity, but of justice; which our fellow creatures in distress ought to receive from us, and which, as we expect, we ought to shew.

S E R.

S E R M O N XXVI.

M A T T H E W XXIV. 13.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same
shall be saved.

IN order to be real Christians, it is necessary to be really good men. Christians, indeed, signify such as acknowledge the truth of the gospel revelation, and sincerely act up to its sacred institutions. But it is not sufficient that we are good by starts; that we perform a generous, benevolent, and virtuous action now and then; we must be steadfast, immoveable, and always abound-

abounding in that which is virtuous and praise worthy; we must maintain the same, even steady and good character through all the various scenes of life; we must persevere in well doing to the end, and always preserve a conscience void of offence, notwithstanding the various temptations and allurements of sin.

I am very sensible of the difficulties that attend a course of virtue and religion. The passions are strong, especially when once they receive the impressions of vice. And the world affords a thousand nameless pleasures to entice the heedless and unwary from the paths of religion. But there is not only a probability, but an undoubted certainty, that if we fight the good fight of faith with sincerity and resolution, we shall overcome; that if we carefully endeavour to recommend ourselves to God, in order to obtain a future, and everlasting salvation, we shall succeed to the utmost of our most sanguine expectation. It is a sincere mind, a firm resolution, with the con-

curring

curing influence of Providence, that are alone necessary to form us for religion and happiness.

But for this end it is highly useful and necessary that we should frequently review those incentives to virtue, which reason and revelation afford. The one presents us with the propriety and amiableness, while the other holds to our view, the blessed consequences of a sincere attachment to religion. The one bids us be virtuous, and to attain the character of good men; for it is highly becoming, and to the last degree reasonable and just; the other inculcates piety and gratitude to God, justice, truth, and benevolence to men, because these alone are the conditions of happiness and salvation. A being who would act, according to the dictates of reason, would pay a great regard to the duties of religion, even without the motives of revelation; but how is his zeal enlivened and enlarged, when he finds that his duty is his interest, that what is most rational, is likewise most profitable? for
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he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. The followers of Christ in every age, and in every clime, that conform to his example and sincerely obey the precepts of the gospel in a regular course of virtue and integrity, till Heaven changes the scene of life, and determine them to another state, may depend that Infinite justice will have an invariable regard to truth and equity, and Divine goodness compleat their future happiness. He that endureth to the end shall be saved, and a patient continuance in well-doing shall be rewarded with eternal life. But let it be observed that enduring to the end, means not to the final period of existence; for if we act up to the conditions required in the gospel, we are to dread no extinction of being; we shall be saved by God, through Christ, and made heirs of salvation, life and happiness: transporting thought! to live through endless ages; not a solitary, recluse, uncomfortable being, but a life, made truly desirable by numberless pleasures: pleasures worthy
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of a creature exalted and dignified with reason, in company with the most virtuous, the best and most perfect beings, and particularly blessed with the beatific presence of the God of nature; the source of all perfection, and the author of all happiness. How exceedingly thankful should we be for such motives as these to virtue and goodness, derived from the spring of salvation, the gospel of Christ!

Virtue in the Christian world is not left to the uncertain hope of a reward. There are no clouds of superstition that overshadow and darken the prospect; no doubts to slacken our progress in the path of salvation; nor is the reward so inconsiderable as to leave any room to doubt, whether Heaven, and future happiness, should be the end and aim of Christians, or the present transient enjoyments of this life divert our thoughts from uncertain future joys, as some affect to call them? No; the reward is certain, if by the virtues in which Christianity is exemplified and displayed,

we render ourselves worthy of it, and equally worth the pains of a most ardent pursuit.

As the God of Heaven created us with the most benevolent designs, with views worthy of a god; he made us to be happy, and in that sense, we may be said to be born heirs of the kingdom of Heaven. But it is possible to forfeit our title to these invaluable possessions, which are infinitely more excellent than all the treasures of a thousand Indies. It must, therefore, be of the utmost importance to examine the foundation on which we stand, with regard to the heritage of God's people; or that life and salvation promised in the gospel. Revelation teacheth, that Adam forfeited, and we have lost all title to immortality; nay, we have ourselves forfeited our claim to that great privilege, having actually transgressed the righteous law of God ourselves. But the Almighty was graciously pleased to repeal the decree, passed upon Adam and his posterity by his son, who is constituted author of immortal life

to all those that believe and obey him: For the Apostle observes, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ are all made alive. But it is upon certain conditions that we are to obtain this great salvation: They are specified in the gospel, and in their own natures highly reasonable and good. The conditions are concisely summed up in the text: "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved." He that continues to act, as the gospel directs (which is dictated by Infinite wisdom) and preserves, unviolated, the native integrity of his mind; at least when he has violated it, heartily repents of his past conduct, and endeavours to pay a cheerful and universal obedience to the laws of Heaven; his sincerity will be accepted, and his perseverance in virtue rewarded with everlasting life and happiness. Thus hath the great Redeemer of the world fully ascertained the immortality of the righteous and good man, upon the reasonable and wise condition of perseverance in virtue. His words are (and they shall certainly

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tainly be accomplished,) He that endureth to the end shall be saved." But it is necessary to this important purpose, that we should be faithful unto death; because the discipline and trial are not finished but by death. And how reasonable such a command; how wise the injunction? For the happiness of Heaven must necessarily be the result of good dispositions and affections of virtue and religion. Let us then be effectually resolved to pursue the road of salvation, by having a just regard to every species of godliness. Let the day of grace be well improved, till the night of death closes the scene of all your labour, our anxiety, and probation. This life will not last for ever; a more important and everlasting state will soon take place, where our conditions shall be determined, according to justice and equity. And how grateful will be the change to those who have made a provision for it; how delightful will it be to look forward to the invisible world with that happy confidence which religion inspires!

from the whole is observable the close connection between virtue and happiness. And that our Heavenly Father expects no service from us, but what he will abundantly recompence: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Indeed, enththufiam and impiery have painted Divinity in other odious lights; that he reaps where he has not sown, and gathereth where he scattered not. But these are unjust representations of the Father of mercies. Indeed, an uniform, stedfast and persevering virtue is required of us, but it is from a consideration and incentive, sufficient to counterballance every thing we can hazard or suffer by it, for the motives of Christianity urge us on, and at the end of our days we shall obtain the end of our fidelity, the crown of our hope, even the eternal salvation of our souls.

Farther, if in order to be saved, we must endure to the end, to begin at the verge of life must be dangerous and fatal in religion and virtue, as it is in all other concerns. If

mistaken men did not wifully shut their eyes nothing could appear more absurd and irrational, than that passion and grief at the end of our days, or the dread of punishment on a death bed, should expiate the guilt of a whole life of sin and impenitence; or that such a repentance should stand in the room of a regular, habitual, and established virtue.

As we would reasonably hope for eternal salvation, let us be sincerely religious, uniformly good; enduring unto the end, for the wicked and impenitent, cannot stand in judgment; but Heaven, solid happiness, pure, sublime, and glorious felicity, will be the sure reward of steady virtue, and an honest, sincere, perseverance in true religion. These are the prospects that present themselves to the good man, and these in the most difficult circumstances enable him to discharge his duty.

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S E R M O N XXVII.

P S A L M S XXXVII. 37.

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for
the end of that man is peace.

The following sermon was occasioned by the death
of Mrs. Mary Hobbes; a descendant of Thomas
Hobbes, the philosopher of Malmſbury.

UPON this awful occasion, I could freely
expatiate on the miseries that are entailed
on the human race, and await all the posterity
of Adam. I might paint them in all those
gloomy and dismal colours, in which they
are too apt to appear when tinctured with
grief and sorrow. But we are too ready
to magnify the calamities of life, when we
observe

observe the black scenes of mortality, and the apparent period of the existence of a fellow-creature; we are too ready to cry out, man is surely made in vain: He just appears on the stage of life, looks about him and returns to his original dust. But we pay little attention to the immortal substance which animates our form; that principle which survives, and is acting in another state of existence. And hence the misfortune, that when the objects are removed from our sight, when committed to the house of clay appointed for all, that these solemn moments, which if properly improved, should put us on seriously providing against death, are soon forgotten, and drowned in the noise and hurry of the world. We again return to our usual habits; court again with eagerness the pleasures of this life; and regard them as our portion and ultimate good. A little consideration would soon point out our mistake; common experience would inform us, if we attended to it, that our happiness cannot arise from what we
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term the pleasures of this life: And the time approaches all of us, when we shall sincerely repent of our folly. How widely different shall we judge of things then from what we do now. Death will strip off every delusion, every object will be represented in its proper light, and the world itself appear an universal blank. The great Author of Nature will summon us before him, and demand what improvement we have made of the time, talents, and advantages allowed us: impartial justice will be rendered to all; to every one will be distributed as much happiness, as the disposition he has formed can enjoy, and those only be unhappy who have hid their talents in the earth, instead of making a proportionable improvement of them.

I shall now proceed to explain the words I have chosen for my text, in a manner the most suitable I am able, to the present occasion. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." We
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are told in scripture, that there is none good but God. That he chargeth even his angels with folly; that the Lord looked down from Heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God: But they are all gone astray, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. On the other hand, we are told that Job was a man, perfect, and upright: one that feared God, and eschewed evil, and amidst the most heavy calamities, held fast his integrity. We are told also, of another character in the New Testament, whom our Saviour, who well knew the hearts of men, pronounced an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile. Our Saviour in another place says, that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and he did not speak this ironically; he did not mean such as thought themselves righteous, when they were otherwise, but such as were truly so; sincerely righteous and good. Hence some people ima-

gine that these texts of scripture involve a contradiction; but if we properly compare the sacred authors they may be very easily reconciled; and in order to do this aright we should impartially consider the whole design of the writer, and never suffer ourselves to argue from single dispersed passages: for when persons form their belief, from a few detached verses, without taking in the context, or the whole that is written; there must arise the wildest and most extravagant notions. The many dull opinions and absurdities, that have prevailed among Christians, have been entirely owing to this; to this also must we impute the increase of infidels, and the contempt of our holy religion; and hence the reason that it has been confined to such an inconsiderable part of the world.

Now as to what the Holy Prophet says: "All are gone aside, they are all together become filthy, there is none that doeth good." He is by that expression either shewing the infinite purity of God, in whose sight the
Heavens

Heavens are not clean, and who chargeth the most perfect of his creatures with folly, or that none of the human race are faultless, or absolutely free from sin. Or, what seems to be his design, seeing the mighty degeneracy of the Jewish nation; how they were abandoned to idolatry and wickedness; he cries out, there is none that doeth good; they have said in their hearts, there is no God; that is, they were become practical Atheists, or behaved as if they did not believe the existence of God; or that they were accountable for their actions. This could not possibly be true of all men; for even in the most abandoned age of the church, God had seven thousand, who had preserved their sincerity, and bowed not the knee to Baal. And parallel to this was the great Diana of the Ephesians, whom all the world worshipped. Such a figurative way of speaking is very common amongst us. On the other hand, when Job is said to be an upright and a perfect man; we are not to think that he was quite free from all sin and perfectly

fectly holy. For he was a person endued with the same passions and inclinations with ourselves; he had many temptations to combat and resist; and it is very natural to suppose that he did not quit himself in all the particulars of his duty, to what the law required, which would have been sinless in the strictest meaning of the word. It is said David was a man after God's own heart, and at the same time we find him charged with some actions that were truly criminal. And thus we easily understand what is meant in our text, by the upright and perfect man. That it is such a one as conscientiously performs his duty to God, and behaves himself towards his fellow creatures, agreeable to the connexion and relation we bear to one another; such a one as does not wilfully indulge himself in the practice of any known sin, or immorality, for God is not to share a divided affection in our hearts; an affection divided between piety and sin; but he must reign triumphant in our breast, unrivalled by any darling vice. Our
best

best actions are, indeed, mixed with imperfection and weakness: but God does not require perfection at our hands. We are imperfect creatures, and we are graciously assured, that the great Author of our natures will accept of our frail weak services; provided we are sincere; provided we follow to the best of our ability, the advice of the Apostle to love one another, even as Christ loved us. As every degree of sin is worthy of a proportioned degree of punishment, and God's gracious promise has entitled every degree of virtue and goodness, to a proper measure of happiness; we should be more diligent in the work of the Lord, and our own salvation; and this should inflame our desires of being more and more conformed unto the likeness of him, that hath called us unto glory and virtue, that we may die the death of the righteous, and that our end may be peace. What is here meant by the end of man, is not that a period is put to his existence. For, in the 18th verse, he observes, "that the

the Lord knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be for ever." The Psalmist means, with regard to death; beyond which there is a dark cloud that hides eternity from our view.

By the end of man, therefore, is meant that time, when we cease to act in this world, that awful moment, when we shall bid adieu to every earthly enjoyment; and must look to the testimony of a good conscience, for our comfort and support. How dreadful is the hour of death to the wicked? how intolerably wretched must those be to whom habitual vice has given a disrelish for the only true felicity, whom a reflection on their past lives, presents nothing but a series of folly, a mind distempered with remorse, and an insensibility of each rational satisfaction! How different his view who has spent his time in virtue and religion; who is conscious of having acted up to the dignity of his nature, who has done all the good in his power. From so sweet a reflection, there arises a serene complacency which is infinitely preferable

preferable to all the joys of sense. Well might the Holy Psalmist say, "mark the perfect, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace. The enjoyments of good men are exquisite and lasting, they are damped with no inward remorse, and ever attended with dignity and self-approbation. And while the transports of vice last but for the present moment, are embittered with the dread of an offended God, and can never produce happiness, either in this world or in a world to come; the enjoyments of virtue extend to an endless futurity, and are heightened by the delightful hope of Divine approbation.

Let me then warn you all against deferring the great work of salvation till it is too late; a death bed repentance of all others is a most fallacious and dangerous experiment, and what has ruined the happiness of thousands. Our friend whom God has lately called out of this world, did not put off this important work to the last hour. She lived to a
great

great age, and she improved it to the best advantage, in making her peace with God; and securing the happiness that he has prepared for the faithful. Her sphere of life was confined, but her benevolence was extensive: she did good, and thought no evil. I mention it, not as an encomium on the dead, but as a pattern for imitation to the living. No truth can be clearer, none is more universally acknowledged, than that to be good is to be happy. But while we acknowledge it in words we pay little attention to it in practice: while the world gives us credit for our strictness to the formalities of religion, the principles which that religion inculcates are, in some degree, neglected. And instead of deriving our happiness from those principles, which if well understood, it would necessarily arise from, we look for it in consolatory expressions to ourselves and each other, and in the shadow of what we ought to enjoy. Let us correct ourselves, therefore. Let us walk humbly with our God, and while we are just,

let us remember that justice demands of us to be, as far as we are able, charitable. We shall then die the death of the righteous, and our end will be peace and everlasting blessedness.

SER-

S E R M O N XXVIII.

H O S E A XI. 8.

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? How shall I deliver thee, Israel ? How shall I make thee as Admah ? How shall I set thee as Zeboim ? Mine heart is turned within me ; my repentings are kindled together.

IT is an observation of an ancient heathen sage, speaking of the books of the Jewish prophets, " From the sublimity and spirituality of their notions, so different in degree and kind from those of the most exalted philosophers,

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phers, one may, perhaps, be inclined to think their claim to a divine inspiration reasonable and just, since God alone can describe himself to man. These writers," saith he, "alone have not violated the Divine Majesty by inadequate and indecent representations; but have made the great Being act and speak in a manner suitable to the supreme dignity of his nature, so far as the gross conceptions of mortals can take him in." The remark is certainly just, and strongly bespeaks the candour, good sense, and integrity of the virtuous sage: for the gods of the heathens were represented as weak, capricious, and sinful beings; but Jehovah, the God of all men, is perfect in every part of his character, whether we consider his power, his wisdom, justice, or greatness.

How amiable the representation which the prophet Hosea gives of the Divine Being, in the chapter from whence the text is taken, as the benefactor, the friend, and father of mankind! What must a sensible and grateful mind feel when he reads the prophet's just representations,

tations of divine greatness and complacency !
 “ When Israel was a child then I loved him,
 and called my son out of Egypt.” When the
 Jewish nation was in its infancy, and groaned
 beneath the yoke of servitude and bondage, I
 loved my people, for their simple and sincere de-
 votion, and their grateful acknowledgments of
 the bounties of Providence. I rescued them
 from the hands of the oppressor ; but they then
 made no return. They forgot the power that
 scattered darkness through the land of their
 enemies ; that led them through the wilderness,
 and in a dry and barren soil fed them with the
 delicacies of life ; “ they sacrificed unto Baal,
 and burned incense to graven images. I
 taught Ephraim also to go ; taking them by
 the arm ; but they became insensible of my
 goodness, and knew not that I healed them.
 I drew them with the cords of a man, with
 bands of love. I was to them as they that
 take off the yoke on their jaws ; and I laid
 meat unto them.” And now that they were
 ripe for destruction, what tenderness does he

express for them; not willing that any should perish, but that all should turn and live. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together." This language is suited to the conceptions of mankind; for the Deity is not liable to repent of his designs, or to change the purposes of his providence. The counsels of heaven, fixed as nature, are not liable to be superseded by any future deliberations; for God is not man that he should repent: and his goodness is set in as strong a point of view, in such expressions of tenderness, as human nature is capable of conceiving.

The prophet Hosea was sent to the Jews when idolatry was gaining ground apace among them. Israel had actually departed from the Lord, and Ephraim bowed the knee to Baal; but the tribe of Judah continued steadfast in their allegiance to the Most High: "Ephraim, faith

faith the Lord, compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah yet ruleth with the Lord, and his faithful with the Most Holy." And in the 7th verse he saith, "My people are bent to backsliding from me; though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him." Though Providence with a most bountiful hand spread among them blessings of life in rich abundance; though he called them to salvation by the voice of inspiration, none would hearken; iniquity still prevailed, and idolatry set up her trophies in the high places. By such a conduct they forfeited the protection of heaven, and incurred the penalties of the law; yet the Deity for a while was willing to preserve them from death and destruction, to withhold the arm of justice, and give them time for salvation. This puts the character of the Divine Being in a most amiable light. Some have represented the Almighty as an implacable, inexorable being: but were that the case, immorality would not flourish as it does in the world, but

rather swift destruction would cut off the disobedient and offender. Was that the truth, the Spirit of the Most High would not be constantly striving with the children of men; nor would Providence be making use of every method, consistent with the laws of his kingdom, and the nature of us moral agents, for their recovery to truth, to holiness, and virtue. No; these are the representations of a tyrant, drawn from false ideas, and a partial view of things. We represent the Supreme Majesty of Heaven agreeable to our own corrupt natures; we assign him the same dispositions which we, perhaps, feel in our own bosoms, or the same as would complete the character of a despotic, merciless monarch. But hear the words of the great King of Heaven: "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee;" ver. 9. Here then let us observe, that mankind are apt to run into two very hurtful extremes from wrong apprehensions of

God: hurtful, I say, as the attributes of his nature are the foundation of all religion, and wrong conceptions of them may have a bad influence on the conduct of life. I shall endeavour therefore to explain the attributes of justice, forbearance, and goodness, as blended in the character of a perfect governor and judge.

On the one hand, some have represented the nature of Divine Goodness in such a light as entirely to exclude the attribute of justice; and thereby rendered it a blind, undesigning, and weak principle. Under the influence of such a sentiment, vice has disturbed and disgraced the moral world. They saw that Providence forbore to bring on immediately the ultimate consequence of their sins; and therefore concluded the part they were acting was not inconsistent with the general nature of Divine Power: they trampled upon all the sacred distinctions of virtue and religion; and yet hoped, severity was so far from the nature of God, that he would still cherish and befriend them. The royal preacher perceiving the fatal

tal tendency of this belief, observes with great truth, "That because sentence is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the children of men were fully set in them to do evil." Others perceiving the unreasonableness and fatal tendency of this loose principle, drove to the other extreme, and without any regard to the truth, represented the Deity, as an unmerciful and cruel tyrant; and to magnify his justice, obliterated his placability and mercy; rendering it a principle favourable neither to the cause of religion or virtue. Thousands have been driven to a state of wild desperation; while others of less sensibility, have contracted the same gloomy, morose, revengeful disposition, which they fancied inherent in their Maker. But perfect justice must include in the idea of it, both wisdom and goodness; wisdom to direct it towards its proper object, and goodness to withhold it in certain circumstances from degenerating to severity, or to soften its rigour.

In order to have a perfect notion of these Divine Attributes, it is necessary, as they are
merely

merely relative perfections, to consider man as a moral being, in a state of discipline and probation; as a being whose nature is imperfect, whose views are very narrow and circumscribed, as endued with reason, as blessed with a revelation of his duty, but as surrounded with temptation; by which his intentions may be rendered ineffectual, and his virtue lost. We must suppose his moral agency in a state of equipoise; neither inclining to good or evil, but as capable of either. On the one hand, he has many strong incitements to that which is evil, arising from the sensibility of passion, the view of pleasure, and the inducements of company: on the other hand, prompted to virtue by the voice of reason, and the suggestions of conscience, influenced by the dread of punishment, and the promises of reward. In this situation, suppose he violates the laws of the Divine Being, and the rules of religion? He immediately incurs a guilt proportioned to the offence only. Does justice, then, necessarily and immediately require his punishment?

ment? According to these apprehensions it does not, for he is in a state of trial; both wisdom and justice require that he should have a chance for salvation; reflection and conviction may step to his assistance; virtue may yet predominate, and the immortal soul be saved. Divine Goodness is concerned for him; mercy indulges him with life, and the means of repentance, and the Divinity calls him to salvation; it threatens, it punishes, but it does not destroy; if he becomes penitent, if he reforms, justice is then disarmed of her terrors, and a rational and just goodness receives him again into favour. In that case, it would be neither proper nor fit; and if improper, it must be unjust to punish him for past offences; for the end of punishment is already answered in the reformation of the person. Mankind generally punish from revenge; and we are too apt to conclude, that our Maker acts upon the same principle with ourselves; but it is a false conclusion, for his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts. Free from

from all passion and every principle of revenge and malice, guided by unerring wisdom, blending justice with ineffable mercy, he punishes, or with-holds punishment, with the noblest and kindest designs. He sees the vain pursuits of mortals, and pities their misfortunes. With the tenderness of a father he expostulates with us in the methods of his providence, and in his word, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together."

To us he shews the same forbearing love, and tender mercy, as he did to the Jews. We have violated his laws, yet he has not made us as Admah. Punishment, in the language of Scripture, is called God's strange work. He is not willing that any soul should perish; how far then must it be from him to contrive their misery or destruction. Though—"Ephraim encompassed him about with lies, and the house

house of Israel with deceit," yet how unwilling is he to visit them with the recompence of their doings, and what a tender anxiety does he express for them in the words of the text.

It is peculiarly pleasing to read over the manifestations of Divine Love, and the tender solicitude of God for all his people, and to reflect that he is a being of the most perfect rectitude, whose kingdom is supported by equity and love; neither rendered terrible by the severity of execution, or contemptible by the distributions of partial fondness; but characterized throughout by a necessary and rational justice, softened with the tenderness of Divine Mercy. It is a happiness to think that though every enjoyment is liable to decay, though the richest blessing of life is uncertain, and life itself temporary and precarious, that we are within the limits of the divine moral kingdom; that in every circumstance of life are upheld in the arms of Almighty power, who, with the most endearing condescension, watches over our preservation, and
gives

gives the mercies of Heaven new unto us every day.

But, nevertheless, though lenity and mildness are the leading features in the divine administration, though Heaven with wonderful indulgence distributes its gifts in equal proportion among the sons of men, and pours the blessings of life in rich abundance into the cup of the sinner, as well as of the good man, we are by no means to conclude from thence, that the righteous and unrighteous are equally the friends of God; that he makes no distinction of character; or that vice shall still flourish under the smiles of his benignity: there may be times when the nature of things require that vice should be permitted to flourish for a while in her folly; but let us not infer from thence, that God will never visit their sins with the rod of his displeasure, for he is just both to punish and reward. A departure from the high road of virtue necessarily produces unhappiness, while a continuance in it as necessarily produces happiness. We may
rest

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rest assured, the Almighty regards no distinctions, but the distinctions of virtue and goodness; and that provided we attend to the immutable laws of his providence, we shall secure his favour, and eternal happiness in this world and the world which is to come.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XXIX.

ROMANS XIV. 17.

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink,
but righteoufnefs and peace, and joy in the Holy
Ghoft.

IN all ages of the church, ritual obfervances;
things of no moment, and that have no
connection with true religion, have more or
lefs occafioned difputes and divifions among
Chriftians; nay, a variety of weak customs,
which have not the leaft tendency to promote
the religion of Chrift, that pure and unde-
filed religion, before God and the Father,
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falvation and immortal life. Had the diftinc-

tion of meats and days, and other frivolous and indifferent things, been preserved as private opinions only, they could have hurt no man; but if the inventors of them endeavour to impose them on others, and blend them with the institutions of Christianity, they then violate the right of private judgment, and we should strenuously withstand them as impious innovations, designed to deprive mankind of their natural liberty. For instance: one man, or a society of men, may think it their duty to kneel at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as it may appear to them a more reverential posture than that transmitted down to us from the apostles. I believe they may do it very innocently; for my part, I should have no objection to them. I can overlook such weakness; but if they endeavour to impose their superstitious practices as terms of communion, we ought to resent it as an affront offered to our reason, as well as an encroachment upon every individual's right of judging and thinking for himself. The design of
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the Christian religion is rational and moral, and recommends nothing to mankind but what has a tendency to make them better and wiser; imposeth nothing trifling or superfluous upon us to observe, inculcates no terms of salvation but what the great and invariable law of nature inculcates; a regular obedience to the rules of virtue and righteousness; or a steady, uniform submission to the commands of heaven and right reason.

X Two positive institutions Christ has left behind him, and which all sincere and true Christians regard as their duty. I mean, baptism and the Lord's supper. And what can have a stronger tendency to preserve that holy religion which the only begotten Son of God has blessed the world with? A religion that restrains all criminal excesses, that strongly prohibits all immoderate gratifications of every thing that is hurtful to us in this world, and that which is to come; a religion that recommends a spirit of love and union; a religion that recommends the noblest and worthiest pursuits, such as truth, virtue, and uni-

versal goodness; in a word, a religion that teacheth how to attain the highest and most substantial joy, and the invaluable happiness of a good conscience and an approving mind.

In baptism, when duly performed, the parents solemnly promise to give their children a religious, sober education, to prepossess them early in favour of virtue and piety. And certainly it is of the utmost importance to inspire them with the most generous love of truth, and an inflexible integrity. The interest of the community, and therefore of every individual, requires that the rising generation should have these divine principles strongly inculcated on their minds. And when they discharge their duty with conscience, happy children! and happy parents! The young will have the pleasure to find their choice aright, fixed upon the principles of virtue and sobriety; pillars more durable than those of brass. They will find their duty, interest, and happiness, the same; their life will glide smoothly on, unmoved by temptations from without, ruffled by no impetuous passions from

from within. The parents will have the inexpressible enjoyment of seeing their pious endeavours abundantly rewarded, and they themselves, with credit and glory, renewed in their offspring.

These are some of the important consequences of baptism, and which shew the wisdom of the institution; not that there is any efficacy in the rite itself, either to reconcile us to God, or make us the better men; though some have laid such a stress upon it as to make it absolutely necessary to salvation, not considering that the kingdom of God is not in "meat and drink, nor any other external ceremony, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; or, in other words, that nothing can recommend us to the Divine Being, but a sincere conformity to his laws; for the most exact observance of external rites will not constitute us real Christians, but honest and upright hearts, and an universal good-will to our fellow creatures. It is these alone can give us a title to the favourable regard of Providence, and to the

happiness promised in the gospel; and by these we must have the charity to believe, that many of those, who have never been blest with the privileges of the Christian religion, will be saved hereafter.

And as to the other great rite which the benefactor of the human race enjoined when he had just finished the work for which he had been sent, and, as it were, with his dying words, "Do this in remembrance of me;" nothing can have a greater tendency to promote a spirit of peace and union among his followers. It is most judiciously calculated to excite every sense of love and gratitude to him that laid down his life to complete the redemption of mankind. As to the ordinance itself, there certainly can be no great virtue in the bread and wine, any further than we comply with a positive injunction; "for the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" but it is apt to beget in us a serious reflecting mind, the highest love and reverence to that Being who beheld his sinful perishing
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offspring with the most tender regard and favourable compassion, and sent his Son to deliver them from the bondage of sin and Satan, and "to purify them to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Here the death of Christ is portrayed, or represented, in the most lively colours. Here his pious submission to his Father's will, and the most enlarged and extensive benevolence to the fallen race of mankind, is painted in the strongest manner. And what breast, that is not lost to every tender sensation, but is gratefully touched with such over-flowing goodness; effectually convinced of the greatness of his love, and the uprightness of his intentions; that is not effectually engaged to tread in his steps, and to follow his virtuous example.

This convinces us of the wisdom and usefulness of the institution, as it is productive of the most salutary effects: and hence the obligation that lies upon every Christian to comply with it. For my part, I cannot see how any one can have the least pretension to the character of a disciple of Christ that lives

in the wilful neglect of any of his commands; for he that is guilty of one breach of the law, or of an omission of one duty, is in a sense guilty of the whole: for though true religion, or the kingdom of God, consists not in meat and drink, nor in any other external ordinance whatsoever, but must consist in a sincere and unwearied imitation of the moral perfections of the Deity, such as justice, holiness, and a regular adherence to the purposes of our being; an uniform obedience to the purposes of the moral law; a harmony and mutual good will and affection between individuals; and a conscious hope, joy, and peace, consequent upon the practice of virtue, which is understood in the text by righteousness and peace in the Holy Ghost; yet surely we ought not to despise, or by any means neglect, any external rite, if it manifestly tends to promote and cherish these virtues and happy effects in our hearts and lives.

There are so many different ways of suppressing serious thoughts; and our present state
affords

affords such a great variety of animal gratifications, that have an intoxicating influence upon our minds, and stifle the silent dictates of reason and conscience, that we should make use of all means in our power to kindle in us every virtuous sentiment, and the warmest, devoutest affections; to have every part of our duty fresh before us, and stamped upon our minds in the largest, liveliest characters. And hence we see the wisdom and goodness of our great Benefactor, who omitted no motive to excite us to every laudable action, in order to raise our natures to happiness and the perfection of virtue. Thus he made it his business while on earth, by the most easy and familiar means, to explain to our reason, and enforce upon our lives, the most inflexible regard to truth and sincerity, virtue and universal goodness, and ground our hopes of immortal life and glory entirely upon these qualifications. The apostle in the text does the same. He assures the Romans, that the Christian religion did not consist in the distinction of days
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and meats; bore no relation to the pompous ceremonies of the Jews, nor the superstitious fopperies of the Heathen; and that the design of the Gospel was to abolish these ceremonies, which were no farther useful; and to encourage by the strongest motives the religion of honest, upright hearts, of sober, useful, and regular lives, and benevolent dispositions; and that these alone can tend to the happiness and perfection of human nature. A steady, uniform, consistent, and zealous observance of these universal, important duties, will convince the world that we are real Christians, that we are willing subjects of God's moral kingdom, that we are sincere followers of our great lord and master Christ; will give us the unspeakable enjoyment and satisfaction of a quiet, approving mind: and without these all other professions of regard to that Being, whose we are, and whom we should serve, are vain and frivolous. And whatsoever does not conduce to render mankind more upright, holy, temperate, benevolent, and righteous, should be regarded

regarded as human institutions, designed for the temporal advantage and emolument of a particular society of people, and should therefore be rejected as an impious and criminal imposition; for whatever does not tend to advance the interest of moral goodness, virtue, and righteousness, is unworthy of the Divine Being to appoint, and unworthy of the regard and reception of intelligent creatures.

Examine with reason and candour the flights of enthusiasm, the sallies of hot, ungovernable zeal, the formal distinctions of meats and days; trace out the advantages they have been to human nature, and ask yourselves, whether they have made one profelyte to the Christian religion? I do not mean one loaded with ignorance and superstition, reverence for the clergy, and confined to their tenets by the invincible chains of bigotry; such it has made, and will continue to make, as long as the superficial mind will be caught by external pomp and shew; as long as the vicious heart will be pleased with trifling commutations for sin,

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or willingly commit every instance of impiety under the cloak of religion. Christianity has certainly received no great benefit from them. The interest of virtue has not been consulted, but undermined; and the Gospel along with it, by being exposed to the scoff and contempt of those who had understanding enough to perceive that these ridiculous customs cannot be religion, cannot be designed to reform the world of ignorance and profaneness, or to enforce the duties of justice and mutual good will; but wanted ingenuity enough to consult that sacred volume, which would soon convince them that this is not Christianity, that these are not the institutions of Christ, but the insidious contrivances of wicked and designing men; and that the Gospel inculcates quite different principles and practices: that it expressly prohibits us to substitute empty forms in the room of substantial piety towards God and charity to men, as tything mint, anise, and cummin; while we neglect the weightier matters of the law (the moral law) justice, mercy, and truth.

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It was the end of our Saviour's coming into the world, to destroy the works of the devil, to abolish the superstitious practices of the Heathen, and the useless ceremonies of the Jew; to demolish the enormous fabric of Pagan idolatry; to restore the worship of the only true and living God; and instead of the blood of bulls and goats, to offer unto him the sacrifices of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, of mercy, righteousness, and rational devotion; of meekness, humility, and cheerful dependance on his providence: "for hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." And again; "he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

In short, reason and revelation agree, that the most formal professions of outward religion will not avail us; that in order to recommend
ourselves

ourselves to the mercy and approbation of God, we must amend our doings which have not been good, cleanse ourselves from all iniquity, and practice every branch of virtue and moral righteousness. To attempt, therefore, to mislead reasonable and accountable creatures, by making religion to consist in the observance of rites and ceremonies, such rites as have no tendency to make them either wiser or better, is certainly one of the most dangerous heresies. Such practices directly lead to defeat the purposes of Providence and of our being. For nothing in the world but the sincere practice of our duty, of righteousness and virtue, the constant improvement of our powers in every thing that is good and great, can ennoble our natures, render us worthy objects of our Maker's love, and fit us for the joys of his presence; for we are assured in the text, that the kingdom of God consists not in meat and drink, but in the practice of righteousness, or a holy and benevolent conduct.

It is evident to every serious, impartial mind, that alone is the commandment or institution of God, which directs us to pay our acknowledgments immediately to the Sovereign of the universe. Our own reflections may convince us of the truth of this; and farther, then alone we can rationally hope that our prayers shall be accepted, when we are conscious of the sincerity of our endeavours to walk in all the ways of God blameless. A diligent application, and a constant improvement of our minds in every thing that can ennoble our natures, or adorn our lives, is therefore evidently necessary. When once we resolve upon a virtuous conduct, we are to advance from the first purpose of our mind to a confirmed habit, and then let us gradually ascend the summit and perfection of virtue. And as Christianity is a scheme so excellent, so ornamental, and beneficial to mankind, let us sincerely comply with its precepts, and in all our conduct act as the redeemed of the Lord; not having the form of godliness only,
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and denying the power of it; but being Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile: knowing that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but who is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God. *p*

SERMON

of the first was to render man immortal, and that of the second to introduce the seeds of corruption and death to our con-

ditions; for have not we the serpent? But of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it: neither

S E R M O N XXX.

touch of it would be mortal. The position that lay hid in it was of its subtle and powerful nature, that it would enter in at the pores, and cause a dissolution of the whole animal

machine, and prove, though a slow, yet certain death; and we have seen the serpent effect in

REVELATIONS II. 7.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

For the Lord God hath said, from the gar-

THIS is an allusion to Gen. ii. 9. where we are told, that, out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The

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nature of the first was to render man immortal, and that of the other, to introduce the seeds of corruption and mortality to our constitutions; for Eve answers the Serpent, "But of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Even the bare touch of it would be mortal. The poison that lay hid in it was of so subtle and powerful a nature, that it would enter in at the pores, and cause a dissolution of the whole animal machine, and prove, though a slow, yet certain death; and we shall see the venom diffused through our frames, the malignant effect in every vein. But of the first, God said, "Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever;" therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden.

What is therefore meant in the text by the expression, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," must be, that the righteous, or he that steadily and sincerely

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S E R M O N XXIX.

ly perseveres to the end in piety and virtue, shall at the general resurrection be raised to glory and immortality; while the wicked, the profane, the obstinate sinner, shall be raised to his condemnation, and be involved in eternal death and destruction. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And again, he that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.

The book of the Revelations is looked upon as very dark and mysterious: but we may venture to say, that whatever is, or can possibly be, of any real advantage to mankind, is set forth in a clear and intelligible manner. What can be plainer, or more easily understood, than what the apostle advances in the text; "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life?" i. e. that only the good, the sincerely virtuous, shall be happy, or enjoy immortal life and glory.

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S E R M O N XXIX.

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In discoursing farther from these words I shall endeavour to enlarge upon the promise they contain; first, "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life." And secondly, shew that the promise of happiness and immortality is made only to those that overcome. And conclude with a suitable application.

The Christian life is very frequently represented as a military state, wherein, without a great deal of prudence, vigilance, and discretion, we are liable to be involved in dangers and difficulties not easily surmounted; therefore St. Paul advises, "to lay aside every weight, and the sin that most easily besets us, and run with patience the race that is set before us: and to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise."

We have various temptations to combat with; many evil habits and prejudices to overcome and root out of our nature; and without a stedfast resolution, and a firmness of mind, we are liable to miscarry and fall short of the glorious reward of virtue. We should,

should, therefore, be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in every thing that is virtuous and praise-worthy. And to this desirable end, we must carefully treasure up in our minds the warmest incentives and strongest motives to religion and exemplary conduct, that we may be able in the very moment of temptation to recollect ourselves, to rally the powers of our souls, and stand against any assault upon our virtue, and not tamely give way to every rising passion, nor meanly comply with the sinful customs and examples of the times.

The great Redeemer of mankind, the blessed Son of God, who was well acquainted with all the movements of the human soul, and all the infirmities which mortal flesh is heir to, pathetically presses us to be always vigilant and on our guard. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch."

A mind unprepared by virtue, religion and a sufficient caution, may be brought to offend against his Maker, and transgress the bounds he has prescribed, by the first sallies of temptation. But the Christian that is always cau-

tious, and carefully observes the approaches of temptations; that looks upon every breach of duty as a derogation from his happiness, that regards himself as acting at all times in the presence of that tremendous Sovereign, before whom all the world shall be judged, such a Christian will gradually become superior to all the temptations that assault his integrity. But courage and resolution, prudence and foresight, of themselves, are hardly sufficient, without an inflexible steadiness of purpose, and a certain, uniform design, running through the whole of our actions; for if after a little struggle, and afterward, though with a little reluctance, we comply with every temptation that offers, sin will at last prevail against us, and will become a confirmed habit, which we cannot easily shake off. It is, therefore, our highest wisdom and interest to study to attain a deliberate and fixed purpose and constancy of mind, a resolution unalterably bent upon virtue and goodness; we should then, by the blessing and concurrence of Providence, soon become sufficiently defended against all
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the snares of the wicked; but if our virtuous intentions change with the first delusive appearance of earthly pleasure or greatness; if we are soon provoked to anger or malice; if we suppress the rising sigh of sympathetic pity, and arm ourselves with a stoick indifference upon seeing human nature in misery or distress; if we suffer the divine affection of love and benevolence to sink into wantonness, or abuse our natural liberty to licentiousness; farewell all virtuous intentions; farewell the integrity and freedom of our minds: we shall soon be incapable of discharging any duty that has the least difficulty. Can it be expected, that the exercises of religion, though perfectly consonant to reason, and the justest notion of things, will be immediately and altogether pleasing to those who perhaps never submitted to them, or long neglected and laid them aside? No; in such a case, where the contrary practices have changed the original complexion of the soul, and turned the dispositions of it into a vicious channel, much pains, and some time, will be requisite before we can root out a pre-

vailing love for the pleasures of sense, and to attain the habits of piety and righteousness. From hence we may learn two things; 1st, That we should be very cautious that we do not suffer our passions to govern our reason and controul the higher powers of the soul, and thereby subject us to all the bondage and slavery of sin: for these are not easily shook off, nor directly overcome; and we shall find it a very arduous task to have any relish for those qualifications which alone can recommend us to the favour of God, and can make us capable of a reasonable enjoyment, even in this world. It requires a fortitude and greatness of mind to subdue ourselves, to forgive iniquities, to overlook the contempt or derision of fools, the oppressor's wrong, or the contumely of the proud; in short, to command the world by a mind prepared for all the changes and vicissitudes of it, and by our having our peace and virtue quite out of its power, which is necessary to render our lives easy and comfortable to us.

Secondly,

Secondly, We should take heed lest we delay the work of salvation till it is too late. The affairs of the eternal world are not to be transacted on the verge of life, at the close of our days. Can it be thought reasonable that a few penitent sighs, perhaps, extorted by immediate apprehensions of our dissolution, or the fear of a just and Almighty Judge, and a few tears poured forth on the threshold of another world, will expiate a whole life of folly, disorder, and sin; or serve instead of an uniform habitual course of piety and virtue. We may assure ourselves, that we shall never eat of the tree of life, or partake of the happiness of heaven, without correspondent wills and affections, without a temper and disposition fitted for it.

But to return. Under the influence of a strong and lively faith in the promises of the Gospel, we overcome. Let us make a comparison between the joys of sense, the pomp and the greatness, all the luxurious entertainment of the glutton, the parade of monarchs, and

and the conscious integrity of the Christian, and certain hope of immortal joys. Can the arms and grandeur of the mightiest tyrant protect him from the heart-felt pain of an evil mind? Can the charms of beauty live for ever? or collected pleasures prolong the span of life, or prevent the silent approaches of the king of terrors? The whole circle of sensual enjoyments are but short and uncertain at best; affliction may render us incapable of them, and death is a total deprivation of them: but he that firmly believes that after death is judgment, that a glorious recompense awaits the virtuous, that the righteous shall be co-heirs with Christ in heaven, will despise the glittering vanities of this life, and the painted charms of sensible things, will sit easy in all conditions, temptations will lose their power upon him and court him in vain. And this will be the case with all of us if we are for ever determined by the dictates of reason, if faith and patience have their proper effect. Though hope is for some time delayed, though the world withdraws its
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smiles, though every thing around us wear a gloomy appearance, and even though death draws the scene, and interrupts all enjoyment; in all these seeming disadvantages, we may possess ourselves in peace, by the steadfast belief of immortality, and the ravishing prospect of a glorious and eternal recompense; for "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God, 1. John v. 45. that strongly believes his divine mission, and that all the promises he made to those that persevere in well-doing, will surely be accomplished. Our Saviour encourages his disciples not to fail nor sink under the adversity they might undergo, nor to give way to temptation, but to hold fast their integrity; "Be of good cheer; in the world you shall have tribulation, but I have overcome the world." John xvi. 33. If virtuous integrity was never to triumph, and if Christian courage

rage was never to overcome, the reproaches of the wicked and profane, the weight of public and private misfortunes, and perhaps the common calamities of life, would make the heart fail; or the contempt with which virtue is often treated might discountenance the bravest mind. But when we look a little forward, all difficulties will vanish, and nothing on earth will appear worthy the pursuit of a reasonable being. Religion tells us the greatest hardships will soon be over, and a state of harmony, peace, and joys inconceivable will succeed. Then what will every thing on earth appear but empty dreams and fleeting shadows. We may therefore encounter the greatest difficulties and dangers in our way to everlasting blessedness. We may chearfully climb the most arduous ascent of religion, and triumphantly look down on the infelicities and distractions that rend the world, and for ever praise the riches of that grace and goodness that enabled us to overcome them; when it is not uncertain or transient pleasures that shall recompense

pense our virtue and fortitude, but a complete, perpetual, and infallible security of the most consummate happiness. This I understand by the promise in the text. We should steadily hold on in a virtuous course. The storms will be soon over, the tempest of our passions will be soon spent. The force of evil examples, the alluring charms of temptations, will shortly sink beneath our notice: sincerity will be no longer distressed and calumniated. The breath of scandal, or the venom of malice, the poisoned shafts of envy, will be no longer felt; their rage will be vain: we shall be above the reach of affliction and disquietude. We shall be happy in the peaceful enjoyment of ourselves; our reason will not accuse us, nor conscience fly in our face. We shall be happy in a perpetual increase of knowledge and goodness, in our nearer approach to the image of our Maker. We shall be happy in the full assurance of a glorious immortality, and the highest perfection of our nature. We shall be happy in the friendship
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of angels and the spirits of the just made perfect, of Christ the righteous, and God the judge of all. In short, our happiness, like the powers of our minds, shall be in a progressive state, approaching nearer and nearer towards perfection. Be ye therefore faithful unto death, that you may receive a crown of life.

I now proceed to the second thing proposed, viz. that the promises of happiness or immortality are only made to those that overcome, or persevere to the end of their lives in virtue and righteousness. This might be proved by the light of reason, and from the attributes of that Being who is no respecter of persons, but renders to every man according to his works; who is not influenced by partiality, and who distributes his favours not by humour or caprice, but acts towards all his creatures as wisdom, goodness, mercy, and justice direct; who renders, as we are told Rom. ii. 7, 10. "to them that by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious,

tentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every one that doeth good."

St. John in this chapter assures the church of Ephesus, that notwithstanding their zeal for the true religion, their works, their labour, and their patience, and that they could not bear those that were evil, for which he highly commends them; nevertheless, says he, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Our conformity to the rules of religion should be sincere and universal, respecting all the commandments of God. We must not neglect one branch of duty, for he that is guilty of one thing is guilty of the whole; that is, had he equal temptation, he would not scruple to commit every sin; for every precept is enforced by the same authority, and God does no more allow dispensations to transgress one commandment than he does to transgress another; we should, therefore,

fore, cheerfully, sincerely, and faithfully perform whatsoever things are honest and of good report, and persevere even unto death. As our conditions hereafter will be determined by our conduct in this life, we should croud into life as many good actions as possible, because these are the seed of a joyful and eternal harvest: for the reward in some sense must arise out of the virtue; at least there must be a capacity and relish for heavenly happiness in order to receive and enjoy it; for the Holy Spirit always connects the fitness and the recompense. Hence we see the purity of the Christian religion, that it connects our duty and reward together; not but that virtue and holiness are in themselves amiable, and to be chosen before all other things, and esteemed for their own intrinsic value and excellence, besides the unreasonableness and deformity of sin; but considering in how low and imperfect state we are at present, and with how many strong temptations we are surrounded, how we have contracted evil habits, and are thereby
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biased to what is evil, God has wisely and mercifully strengthened the cause of virtue and religion, by the promise of a future reward, which will be truly great and noble, and deterred men from sin by the threatening of a most miserable punishment, reserved for all those that live wickedly during this their state of trial and discipline. Farther,—even the conditions of mankind, and their natural capacities, prove the truth of what the text advances, that a steady and resolute perseverance in virtue shall be entitled to life and immortality. The passions and affections, and, above all, the distinguishing ornaments of humanity, if their motions be attended to, spur us on to every thing that is laudable and virtuous.

We have desires implanted in our natures for an eternal continuance of existence; and, considering the strong assurance we have had by Christ that our souls shall not perish with our bodies, it is hardly possible that a man of common understanding can be a moment in suspense, whether final rewards and punishments shall

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succeed

ucceed the present state, or whether an equitable judge will render to every man according to his work. What, then, are we formed and designed for—virtue? and shall it never be perfected? Or do we sincerely aim at a rectitude of nature, and shall we pass unrewarded? It will be quite otherwise; “for to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

From what has been said we are to observe, that happiness is inseparably connected with virtue, with a pious and good life, that our duty is our interest, that the most durable and substantial joys spring from innocence and integrity, and that life and immortality are the portion of those only that overcome, or those that patiently continue in well-doing to the end. That when sin is rooted in our natures, and the day of life far spent; when we suffer vice to grow to a habit, there is no great probability we shall ever overcome. Hard sayings have been uttered concerning the righteous Governor of the world, that he reaps where he has not sown;

fown; but, we may depend upon it, these are entirely false and unjust representations of the good Parent of the universe, for he has assured us that virtue shall not lose its reward, though an uniform and perfect obedience cannot be expected. But we have sufficient encouragement to follow after perfection, when we counterbalance the strength of present temptations and difficulties, lessened by the grace of Christ helping us, and the enjoyments that are promised in another world. The recompense of reward urges us on, that at the end of our days we shall eat of the tree of life, and receive a crown of glory, even the salvation of our immortal souls.

T H E E N D.